Stress, Trauma & Community Organizing

An Introduction to Trauma, Organizing & Systems Change

Individual Trauma

Has Many Names

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Toxic Stress?

Chronic Stress?

ACES?

Complex Trauma?

Child Traumatic Stress?

Allostatic Load?

Complex PTSD?

Developmental Trauma Disorder?

Acute vs. Chronic Trauma?

CANarratives.org
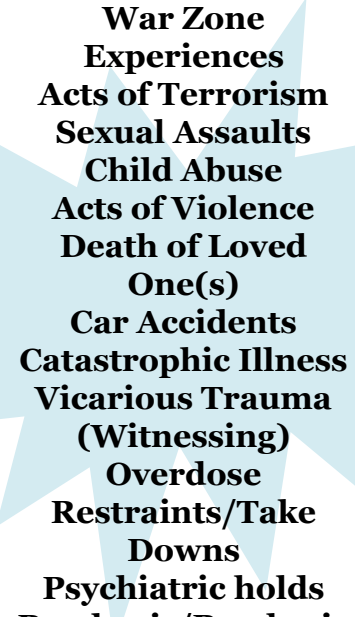
Big "T" Trauma

Natural Disasters
Man-Made Disasters
War Zone
Experiences
Acts of Terrorism
Sexual Assaults
Child Abuse
Acts of Violence
Death of Loved
One(s)
Car Accidents
Catastrophic Illness
Vicarious Trauma
(Witnessing)
Overdose
Restraints/Take
Downs
Psychiatric holds
Psychosis/Psychotic
break
Manic Episodes
Suicide Attempt

Little "t" Trauma

Dog Bites
Routine
Surgeries
Falls
Invasive
Dental or
Medical
Procedures
Minor Car
Accidents
Medication
Side Effects
Multiple
Med
Regimens

"C" Trauma

Racism
Poverty
Homophobia
Bullying
Oversaturation in
Media
Domestic Violence
Child Abuse
Multiple Deployments
Vicarious Trauma
(Witnessing)
Multiple
Hospitalizations
Sexism
Institutional Racism
Homelessness
Stigmatization
Multiple Diagnoses
Micro Aggressions
Incarceration
Gravely Disabled
Immigration
Challenges
Historical Trauma

When the nervous system becomes overwhelmed, people can lose the capacity to stabilize and regulate themselves
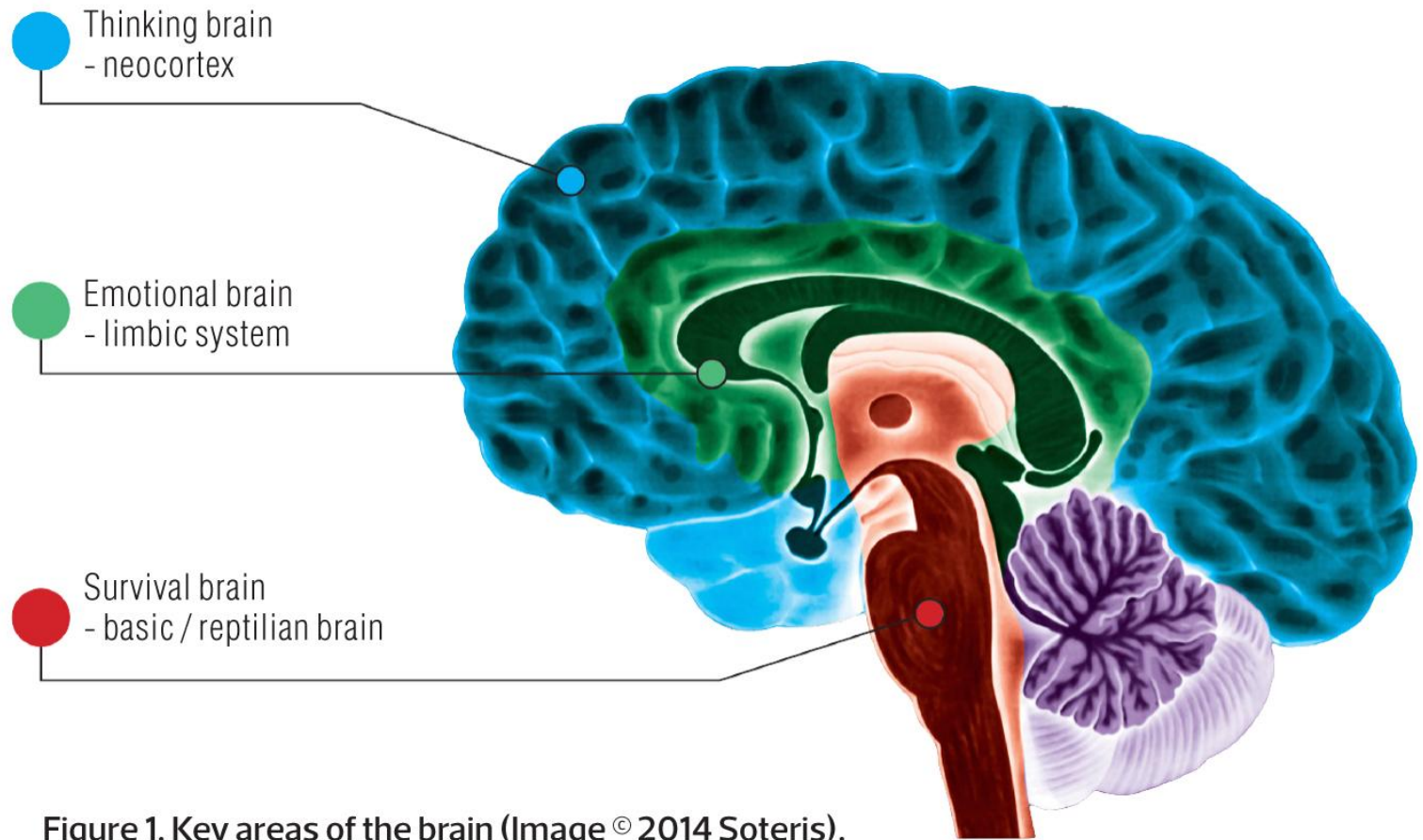
- Thinking brain
  - neocortex

- Emotional brain
  - limbic system

- Survival brain
  - basic / reptilian brain

Figure 1. Key areas of the brain (Image © 2014 Soteris).

INTERGENERATIONAL & SYSTEMIC TRAUMA

TRAUMA is no longer only an individual experience, it is also a societal and a global reality.

Many persons suffer anxiety and stress from the current crises in our world.

• Unhealed trauma within leaders can impact organizations and whole nations when personal traumas are projected onto others.

• Intergenerational and cultural patterns can be contributing factors to trauma.

• Traumatogenic institutions and systems can impact whole societies.

Vicarious or Secondary Trauma—Compassion Fatigue

Who:

Caretakers or family who care for those dying of cancer or AIDS; counselors, therapists, psychologists who work with victims of abuse, trauma or natural disasters; emergency response workers, police, soldiers, firemen, and those who work in situations of violence or danger.

Symptoms:

The same as for the traumatized:

Physical: stress, chronic fatigue, pain of the head or body, insomnia, and other psychosomatic illnesses.

Emotional: depression, anxiety, addiction, guilt, sadness, grief, helplessness, emotional problems with others, lack of confidence, aggression, strong emotions.

Mental: Loss of concentration and memory, flashbacks, mental confusion.

What is the Resilient Zone?

❖ A state of well-being in mind, body and spirit

❖ When in the Resilient Zone one is able to handle the stresses of life

    ❖ You can be annoyed or even angry but do not feel like you will lose your head

    ❖ You can be sad but not feel like you will be washed away by the river of sorrows

Resilient Zone

(c) Trauma Resource Institute
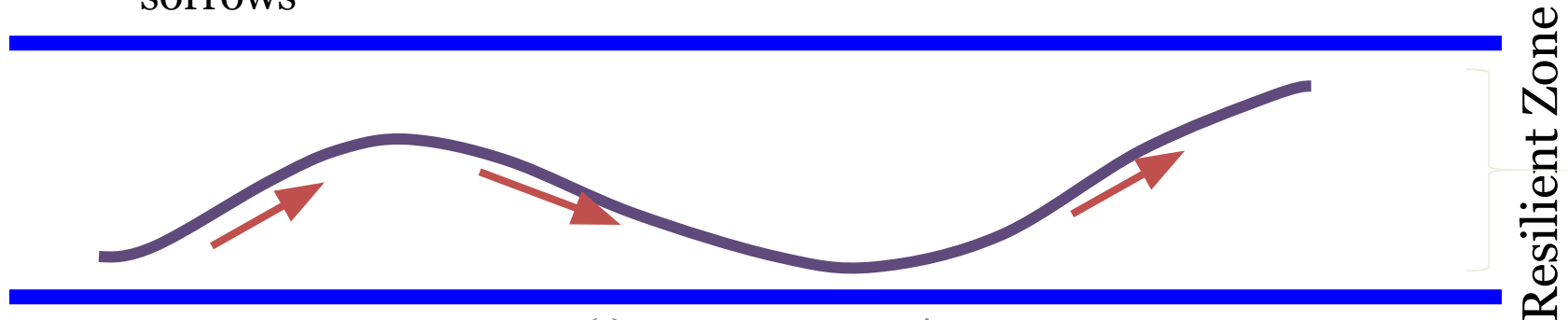
Traumatic/Stressful Event
or
Stressful/Traumatic Triggers

Stuck in High Zone

Edgy
Irritable
Mania
Anxiety & Panic
Angry outbursts
Pain

Resilient Zone

Depression/Sadness
Isolated
Exhaustion/Fatigue
Numbness

Stuck in Low Zone

Graphic adapted from an original graphic of Peter Levine/Heller, original slide design by Genie Everett

9
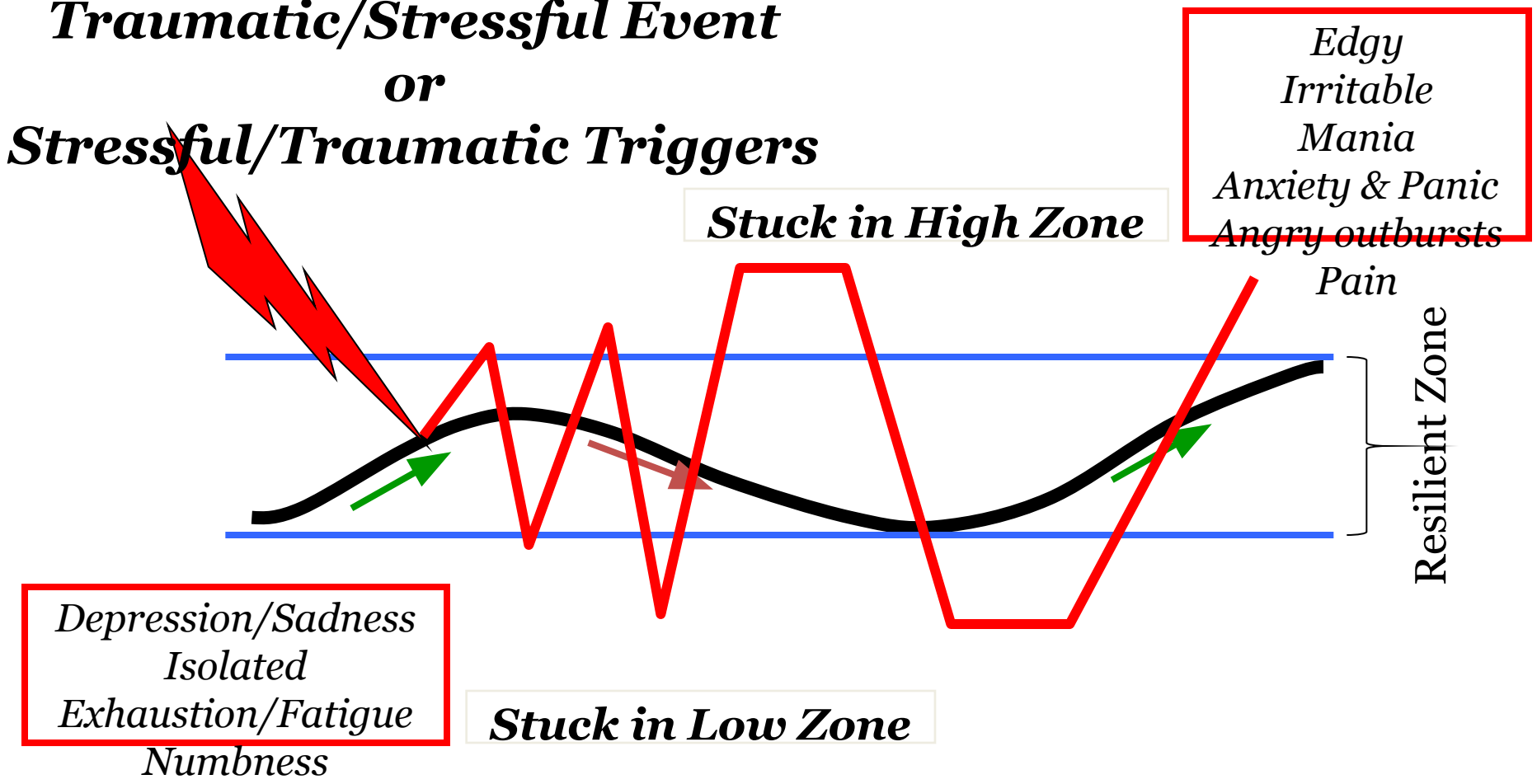
ACE EFFECT

BEHAVIOR

Lack of Physical Activity	Smoking	Alcoholism	Drug Use	Missed Work

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Severe Obesity	Diabetes	Depression	Suicide Attempts	STDs
Heart Disease	Cancer	Stroke	COPD	Broken Bones

Violence & Community Trauma

Trauma is widespread and has far reaching impacts

- Trauma is pervasive

- Trauma has a significant impact on development, health and well-being.

- Concepts of poly-victimization and complex trauma

- Trauma informed care becoming standard practice

Trauma at the community level

- High levels of violence => whole community traumatized

- Slight shift from individual to community trauma

- Predominant focus is still on individual trauma

- Trauma undermines efforts to promote health, safety and well-being

- Community trauma is **not** just the aggregate of individuals with trauma...it is from **structural violence**

What is STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE?

- refers to harm that individuals, families and communities experience from:
  - the economic and social structure,
  - social institutions,
  - social relations of power, privilege and inequality &
  - inequity that may harm people and communities by preventing them from meeting their basic needs

Figure 2 The Production of Trauma from Violence

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

VIOLENCE THREAT OF VIOLENCE LOSS

INDIVIDUAL SYMPTOMS

INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA

- Re-experiencing
- Emotional numbing
- Avoidance
- Increased arousal

COMMUNITY SYMPTOMS

COMMUNITY TRAUMA

Equitable Opportunity
- Inter-generational poverty
- Unemployment
- Disinvestment

People
- Disconnected, damaged relations
- Destructive social norms
- Low sense of political/social efficacy

Place
- Deteriorated environments
- Unhealthy, dangerous public spaces
- Crumbling built environment

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

VIOLENCE THREAT OF VIOLENCE LOSS

INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA

INDIVIDUAL SYMPTOMS

- Re-experiencing
- Emotional numbing
- Avoidance
- Increased arousal

COMMUNITY TRAUMA

COMMUNITY SYMPTOMS

Equitable Opportunity
- Inter-generational poverty
- Unemployment
- Disinvestment

People
- Disconnected, damaged relations
- Destructive social norms
- Low sense of political/social efficacy

Place
- Deteriorated environments
- Unhealthy, dangerous public spaces
- Crumbling built environment

Community Healing & Resilience

Emerging practices addressing Community Trauma

- Culturally relevant healing circles and practices

- Restorative / Transformative justice practices

- Development of framework to fully understand and address the symptoms of community trauma

- Trauma Informed Community Organizing

- More/better paid Jobs, Public Spaces (parks) & Housing

- Practices that foster and repair social/community relationships

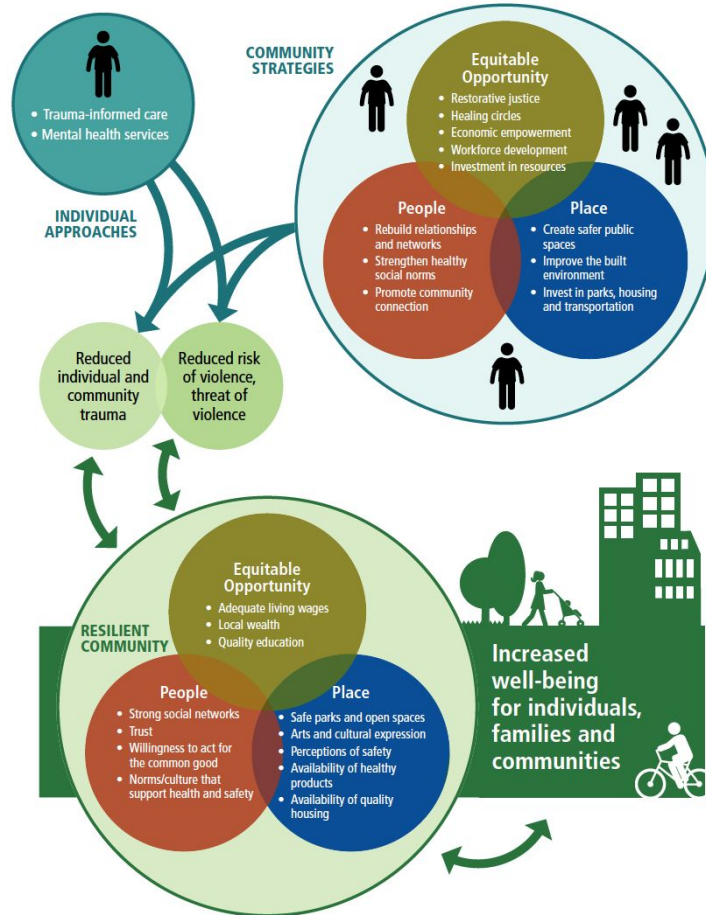**Figure 5** Promoting Community Resilience: From Trauma to Well-being

COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Equitable Opportunity
- Restorative justice
- Healing circles
- Economic empowerment
- Workforce development
- Investment in resources

People
- Rebuild relationships and networks
- Strengthen healthy social norms
- Promote community connection

Place
- Create safer public spaces
- Improve the built environment
- Invest in parks, housing and transportation

INDIVIDUAL APPROACHES
- Trauma-informed care
- Mental health services

Reduced individual and community trauma

Reduced risk of violence, threat of violence

RESILIENT COMMUNITY

Equitable Opportunity
- Adequate living wages
- Local wealth
- Quality education

People
- Strong social networks
- Trust
- Willingness to act for the common good
- Norms/culture that support health and safety

Place
- Safe parks and open spaces
- Arts and cultural expression
- Perceptions of safety
- Availability of healthy products
- Availability of quality housing

Increased well-being for individuals, families and communities

Figure 5 Promoting Community Resilience: From Trauma to Well-being

COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Equitable Opportunity
- Restorative justice
- Healing circles
- Economic empowerment
- Workforce development
- Investment in resources

People
- Rebuild relationships and networks
- Strengthen healthy social norms
- Promote community connection

Place
- Create safer public spaces
- Improve the built environment
- Invest in parks, housing and transportation

INDIVIDUAL APPROACHES

- Trauma-informed care
- Mental health services

Reduced individual and community trauma

Reduced risk of violence, threat of violence

RESILIENT COMMUNITY

Equitable Opportunity
- Adequate living wages
- Local wealth
- Quality education

People
- Strong social networks
- Trust
- Willingness to act for the common good
- Norms/culture that support health and safety

Place
- Safe parks and open spaces
- Arts and cultural expression
- Perceptions of safety
- Availability of healthy products
- Availability of quality housing

Increased well-being for individuals, families and communities

"No epidemic has ever been resolved by paying attention to the treatment of the affected individual."

— Dr. George Albee

Trauma Informed Community Building Principles

- ## Do No Harm

  - Aware of past and current trauma - programs & services that avoid re-traumatization

- ## Acceptance

  - Meet residents where they are, accept the reality of the community conditions and set expectations accordingly

- ## Community Empowerment

  - Recognize the importance of self determination to encourage community investment and that everyone can play a supportive role

- ## Reflective Process

  - Encourages and ongoing reflective practice that responds to new developments and knowledge and is constantly adjusting to meet the needs of the community & overal vision of the neighborhood

What is Trauma Informed Community Organizing?

- It's about CHOICE!

  - Allowing everyone the choice to…participate…stop…leave…etc.

- It's about SAFETY!

  - Building spaces/groups that are PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, and SPIRITUALLY safe.

- Radical Acceptance & Understanding

  - Histories, current experiences, triggers, know the signs…meet them where they're at!

- Being a Compassionate Witness & Reflecting

  - Listening with empathy and compassion…NOT trying to fix or eliminate feelings/needs.

  - Reflect on experiences, learn from them, implement new strategies

Where do you start?

- Modeling...it starts with YOU!

    - Learn and establish your practice of SELF CARE & EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Learn and Build an Organizational Culture

    - Build it into your everyday work, meetings, groups & gatherings

- Find additional support and resources

- It's a PRACTICE...PRACTICE...PRACTICE !

THEN...

- Get civically engaged!

  - VOTE !!!

  - Learn who your elected representatives are - meet and talk with them about the issues

- Support organizations & community groups

  - Donate - go to a meeting - get to know who they are

Thank you