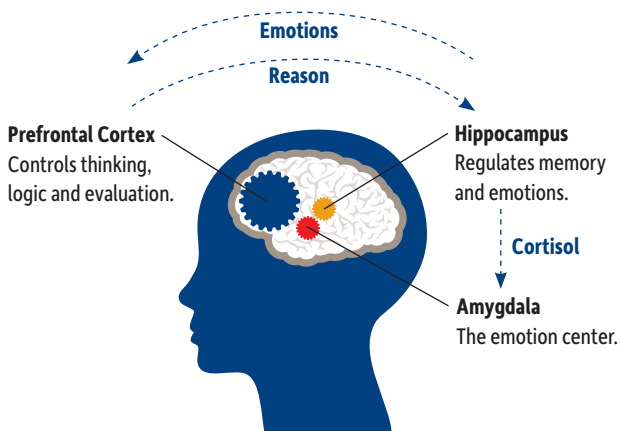


Youth and Trauma

What is Trauma?

Physical: An often serious, and body-altering physical injury, such as the loss of a limb.

Psychological: An emotional or psychological injury usually resulting from an extremely stressful or life-threatening experience.



When the trauma response is triggered the amygdala “hijacks” the brain which makes it difficult to regulate thoughts, emotions and actions.

The Workings of the Traumatized Brain

- Cortisol, the stress hormone, floods the brain during a traumatic event, and is easily triggered—even when there is no real threat.
- When the trauma response is triggered, youth respond from the brain’s emotion center and find it difficult to regulate thoughts, emotions and actions.

Sources of Trauma: ACEs

Sources of childhood trauma are also known as adverse childhood experiences or ACEs.

Examples include: Death of a parent, emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, exposure to domestic and/or community violence, household substance misuse and mental illness, parental separation or divorce, incarceration of a household member, homelessness.

The Bad News

Law enforcement officers come in contact with youth who are disproportionately affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). These youth are exposed to risk factors including mental illness, family dysfunction and community violence.

The Good News

Resilience, the ability to bounce back, is ordinary, NOT extraordinary. A person’s ability to be resilient is based on the presence of protective factors in their lives. These include healthy relationships with adults, peer friendships, attachment to school, and “pockets of competence” in some areas, such as art or sports.



Police can play an important role in promoting resilience in youth. Just like a child bouncing on a trampoline, people have the innate ability to bounce back. This is called being resilient. Resiliency is also known as the ability to develop in a healthy manner despite facing adversity.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over 90% of juvenile justice-involved youth have experienced at least one ACE, with many reporting experiencing an average of 5 different ACEs.

A history of trauma increases the risk of arrest by 59% and of committing a violent crime by 30%.

The prevalence of youth experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the juvenile justice system is 8 times higher than in the community.

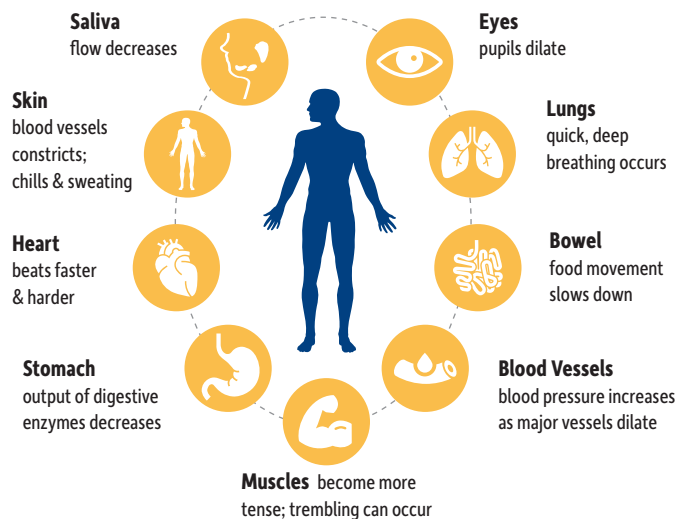
Youth in low-income communities face significantly more adverse experiences than children from a higher socioeconomic status.

Recognizing and Responding Effectively to Traumatized Youth

How Do Youth Show Their Trauma?

Youth who have experienced trauma may:

- Appear overly-alert, hyper-reactive and startle easily.
- Feel a loss of control and power, and act in ways intended to regain that power.
- Assume the worst and anticipate the need to protect themselves—leading to verbal and physical fights.
- Withdraw by drinking, using drugs, or running away as a response to heightened fear that they are trapped and cannot escape.
- Freeze—they cannot fight or take flight.



Understanding How Traumatized Youth View Law Enforcement

- The presence of an authority figure can cause traumatized youth to lose the ability to regulate their behavior.
- Traumatized youth may not view authority figures as rescuers, but as abusers.
- Behaviors in youth that may seem suspicious, such as hyper-alertness or extreme defensiveness may actually be by-products of the youth's post-trauma protective mechanisms.

Best Practices for Interacting with Trauma-Affected Youth

- **De-escalation technique:**
 - Ask youth to count to 10 and take deep breaths.
- **Talk through alternatives** with youth to specify the behavior you expect from him or her:
 - **Officer behavior:**
 - What is your posture?
 - How close are you?
 - Does the youth feel cornered?
 - Recognize “triggers” like touching, yelling, loud noises, certain language.
 - **Officer language:**
 - Ask “What happened?” not “What did you do?”
 - Use a calm tone, repeat any directions or questions.
 - Distract to disengage youth from anxiety.
 - Ask “What would be helpful to you?”
 - Explain what you will do next to reduce youth’s anxiety and reactivity to you.
 - **Officer timing:**
 - Slow down all interactions.
 - Repeat 3 times, using same tone and emotion (once to convey tone and emotion, once to convey message, and once to reinforce both).

REMEMBER! Traumatized youth see everything on a *spectrum of power and control*. Perceived powerlessness in the presence of an authority figure signifies **DANGER** to them.