

Trauma-Informed Education: Understanding Chronic Traumatic Stress

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Objectives

- Review the definition and impacts of trauma
- Learn how chronic traumatic stress affects the brain and behavior
- Reflect on your own experiences with chronic stress
- Explore strategies and approaches to supporting students, staff, and yourself in dealing with chronic stress




Challenge Yourself...

By now we've all heard of trauma-informed practices!

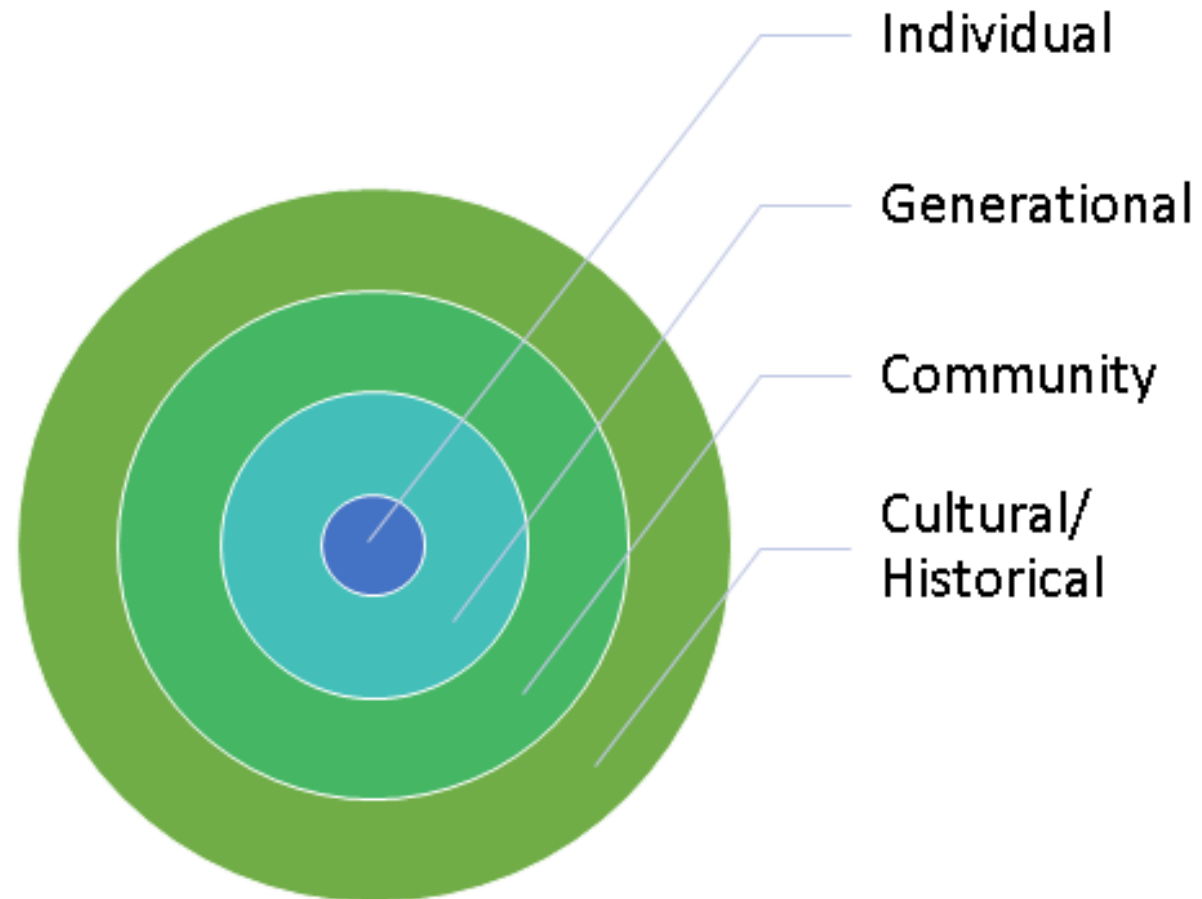
If this is review for you, ask yourself:

- Am I putting what I know into practice *consistently*?
- How I can expand or improve upon my practices?
- How can I innovate and adapt my practices to the current situation?
- How can I apply my knowledge at a systemic level?

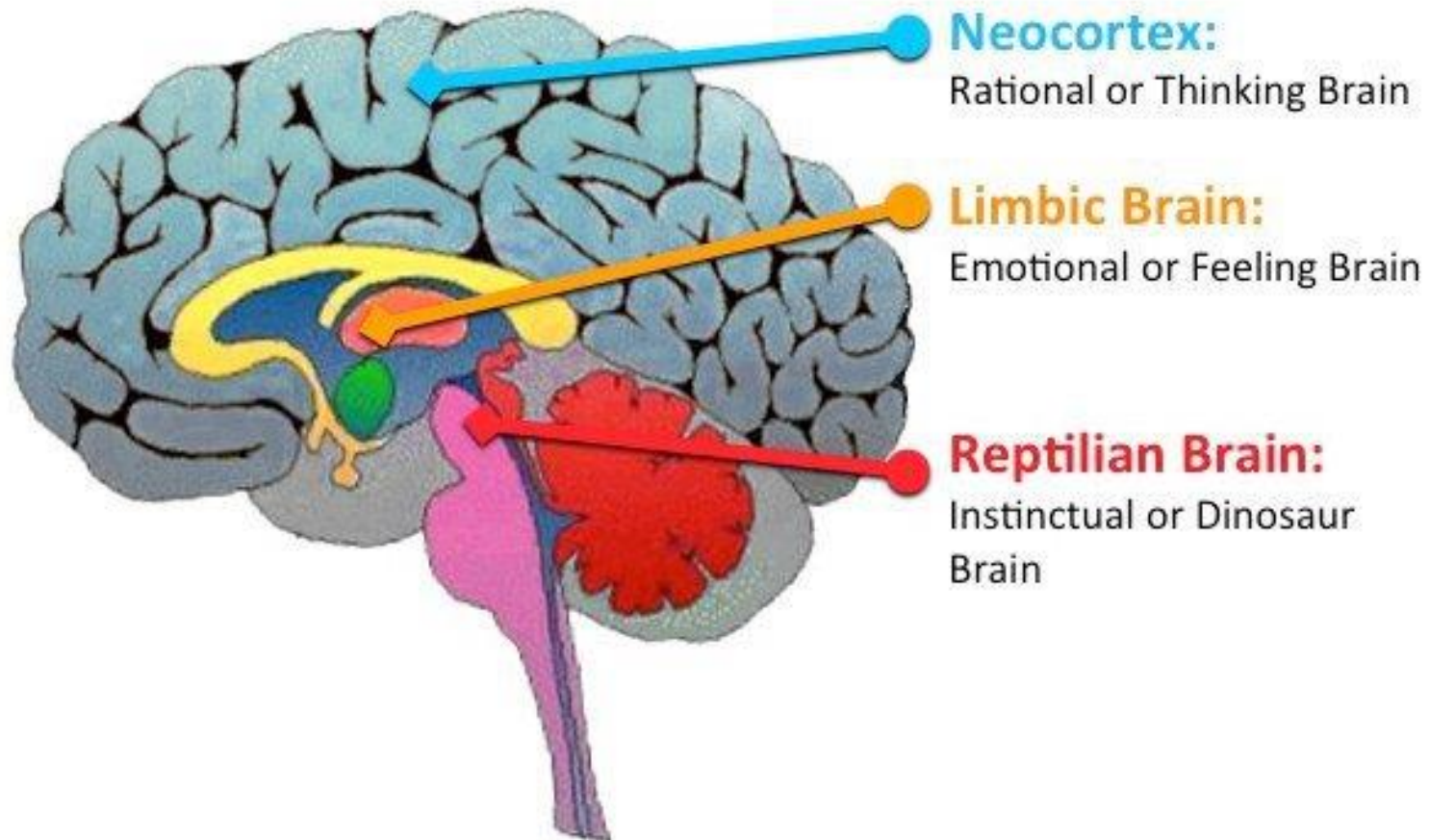
Defining Trauma

		
Experience of real or perceived threat to one's safety or survival	Or witnessing a real or perceived threat to the safety or survival of another	That causes feelings of fear and helplessness which overwhelm normal coping.

Layers of Trauma



Trauma's Impact on the Brain



Trauma's Impact on the Brain

- “Lizard brain”
 - Focus on survival; constantly on the lookout for threats
 - Fight, flight, or freeze
 - Driven by emotions
 - Resistant to change
- Potential impairments in:
 - Memory
 - Sensory processing
 - Executive functioning
 - Social skills



Trauma's Impact on Behavior



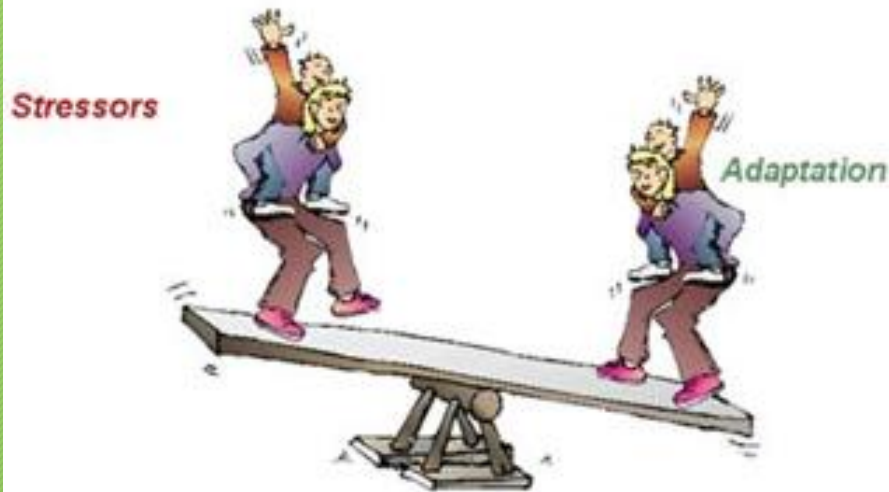
- Hyperaroused
- Hypoaroused
- Somatic complaints
- Regressive behavior
- Re-enacting or re-experiencing
- Mental health and learning challenges
- Perfectionism, anxiety, other internalizing behavior
- High-risk behavior

Chronic Traumatic Stress

- Constant or recurring threats to one's wellbeing
 - Overwhelming allostatic load
 - Straw that broke the camel's back
- Impacts the brain in the same way
 - In the short term: constantly navigating stressor(s) and managing stress response
 - In the long term: patterns of maladaptive or inappropriate coping



Allostatic Load



Allostasis

Some stress can be energizing and toning to the system. Body systems adjust well to stressors without over taxing resources.



Allostatic Load

Body systems achieve a kind of balance, but everything is working too hard and we begin to slowly break down.

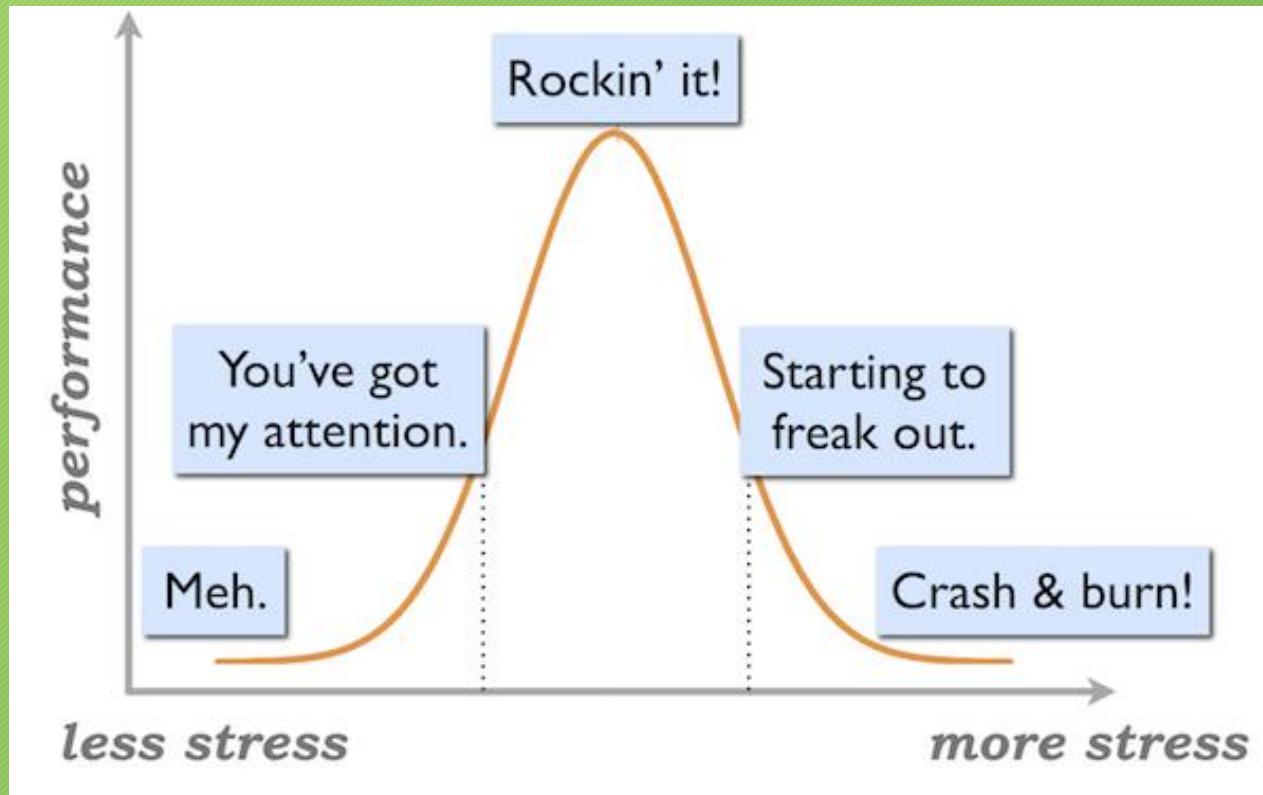
Examples of Chronic Stressors

- Poverty
- Discrimination/belonging to a marginalized group
- Homelessness/insecure housing
- Unstable or inconsistent caregivers
- Adultification
- Immigrant or refugee status
- Chronic illness
- Unsafe communities

Impacts of Chronic Stress

- Easily distracted/preoccupied, difficulty focusing
- Irritability, outsized reactions
- Poor self-regulation
- Somatic complaints
- Exhaustion and fatigue
- Anxiety

Is All Stress Traumatic Stress?



- No! But...
- Stress is subjective
- Stress is cumulative
- Our coping abilities may fluctuate
- Toxic stress has similar adverse effects, even in the short term

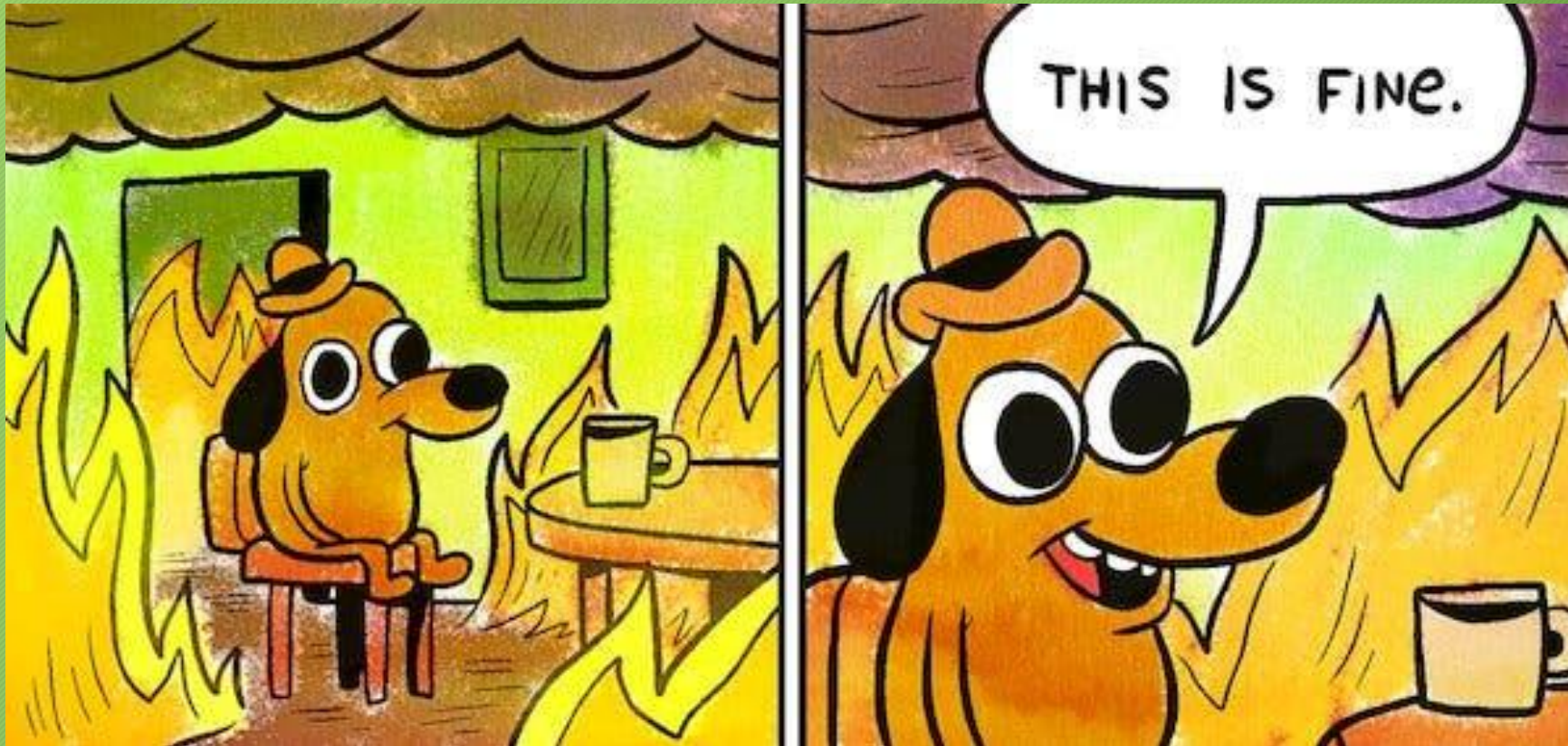
Reflection

What stressors are you experiencing right now? How is it impacting you?

How do you know when stress moves from being manageable to being overwhelming?



How Can I Address Chronic Traumatic Stress?



Comic by KC Green

Being Trauma-Informed is a Mindset

- How do you view your students?
 - What are your driving beliefs and assumptions?
- How do you view your relationship to your students?
 - Are you operating from a hierarchical or collaborative paradigm?
- How do you view your interactions?
 - Is your goal education or control?
- Trauma-informed practices are *best practices*!

Strategies are Universal!

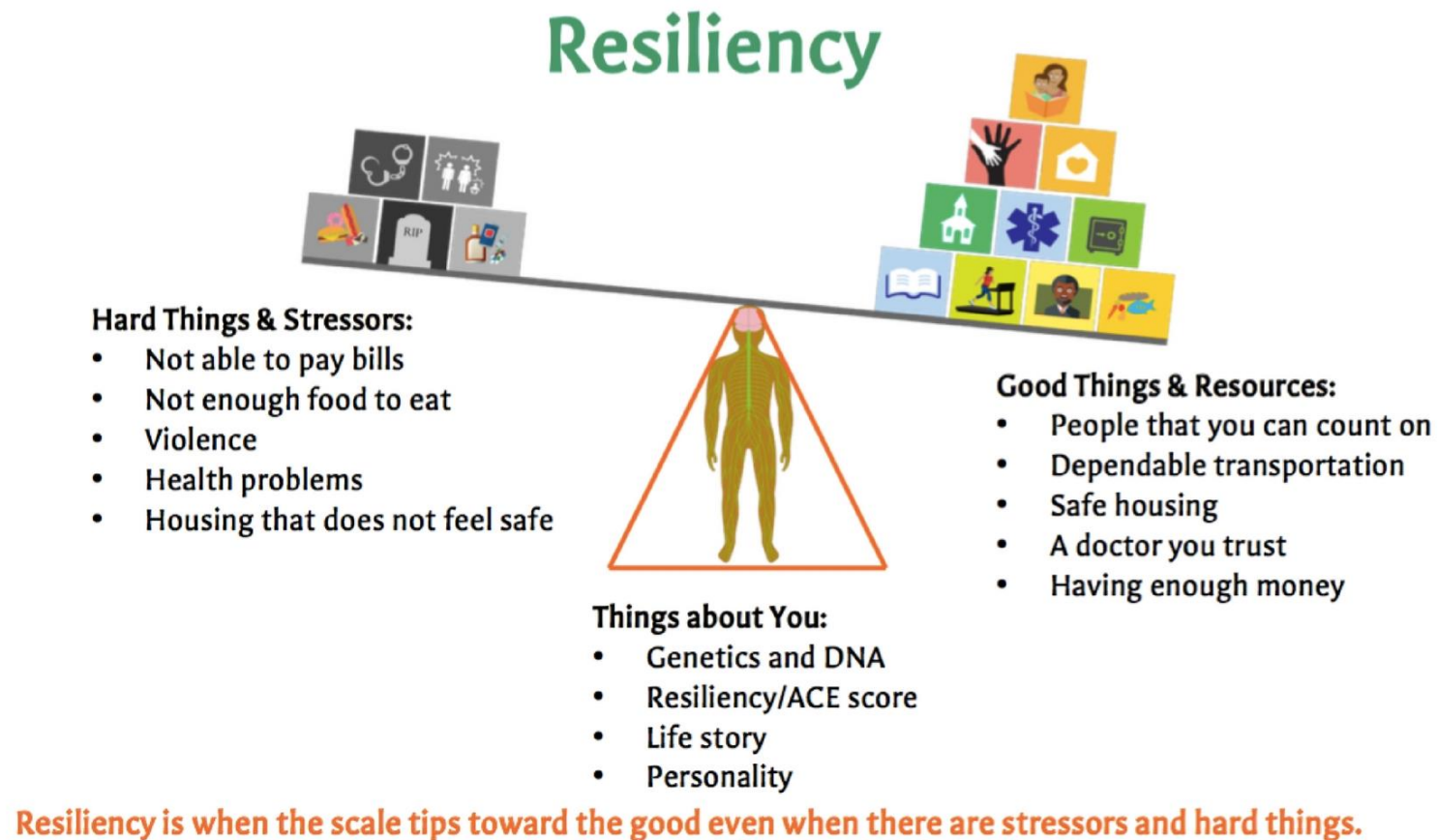
- Knowing or labeling trauma history isn't the most important thing
 - Trauma is subjective
 - Not all those who experience “trauma” will be “traumatized”
 - Everyone will experience at least temporary hardship, ie grief
- Strategies are not just for students

What is Your Role?

- How can you help your students?
 - You can't make the trauma go away, but...
 - You can add in more good things
- Risk factors vs. protective factors
- Resilience: ability to “bounce back” or adapt in response to hardship
 - *Resilience is malleable and teachable!*



Tipping the Scale of Resilience



Strategy: Build Resilience

- Foster a growth mindset
 - Validate the effort, not just the achievement
 - Support problem-solving
 - Normalize failure
- Promote a strengths-based narrative
 - Create a strengths profile
 - Remember, we see what we look for
- Build social-emotional competency and mastery



FIXED MINDSET

- SOMETHING YOU'RE BORN WITH
- FIXED

- SOMETHING TO AVOID
- COULD REVEAL LACK OF SKILL
- TEND TO GIVE UP EASILY

- UNNECESSARY
- SOMETHING YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH

- GET DEFENSIVE
- TAKE IT PERSONAL

- BLAME OTHERS
- GET DISCOURAGED

SKILLS

CHALLENGES

EFFORT

FEEDBACK

SETBACKS

GROWTH MINDSET

- COME FROM HARD WORK.
- CAN ALWAYS IMPROVE

- SHOULD BE EMBRACED
- AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW.
- MORE PERSISTANT

- ESSENTIAL
- A PATH TO MASTERY

- USEFUL
- SOMETHING TO LEARN FROM
- IDENTIFY AREAS TO IMPROVE

- USE AS A WAKE-UP CALL TO WORK HARDER NEXT TIME.

Reflection

Think about one of your most challenging students...

Without giving any identifying information, what are some of that student's strengths?



Strategy: Prioritize Relationships



- Connect before you direct
 - People don't learn from people they don't like
- Building relationships builds trust; building trust builds safety
- Build community
 - Not just the relationship between you and the student!
 - Circles, restorative practices, morning meetings

Reflection

How do you build or maintain relationships during social distancing?

How do you encourage student-to-student relationships during social distancing?

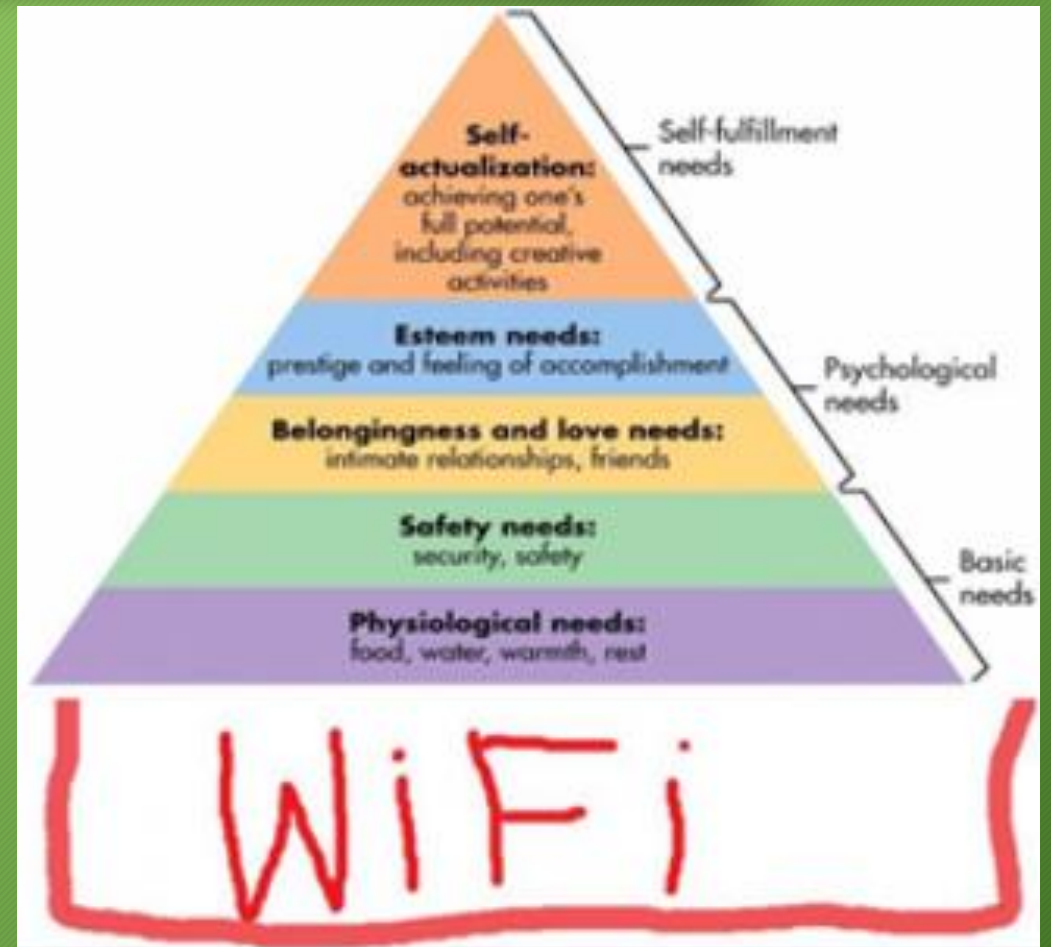


Strategy: Empathy and Compassion

- Empathize and validate feelings
 - Not the same thing as agreeing
- Change your language
 - “But...” -> “And...”
 - “It’s not a big deal” -> “I can see this is really impacting you”
 - “It will be fine” -> “What tools can help us get through this?”
- Curiosity vs. judgment

Strategy: Promote Safety and Control

- Consistency is key
 - Uncertainty breeds anxiety
- Develop a routine
 - Plan and communicate as much as possible
- Provide choice and control
 - Bounded choice
 - Avoid power struggles - pick your battles



Reflection

How are you infusing consistency into the current situation?

What are some barriers or challenges with creating a remote routine?



Strategy: Mindfulness



- Definition: simply *being present!*
- Create positive feedback loops
- Doesn't need to take a lot of time
 - 5 senses activity
 - Deep breathing/square breathing
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
- Focus on bodily awareness
 - Mental mindfulness might be hard for students with trauma
- Practice now so it's accessible as a coping strategy when overwhelmed

Reflection

Do you practice mindfulness?

What are your favorite mindfulness activities?

How can you adapt them to a remote format?



This Is For You, Too...

- All of these strategies apply to you!
 - Practice self-compassion
 - Approach your feelings with curiosity, not judgment
 - Focus on your relationships
 - Name your own strengths
 - Maintain a growth mindset - be flexible
 - Establish a mindfulness practice
- Self-care is also a strategy!
 - You can't pour from an empty cup
 - Supports co-regulation
 - Mirror neurons



Questions?



Thank You!

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