Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)

- **Overview for Schools**

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Training Overview

- **What is a threat?**
- **Why should we do Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management?**
- **Overview of threat assessment as a practice**
- **Creating a Threat Assessment Team**
- **Impact of trauma and stress on the developing brain and why it relates to threat assessment**
- **Q&A**

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Part I:
What is a Threat?

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What is a threat?

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary:

1. **an expression of intention to inflict evil, injury, or damage**

2. **an indication of something impending**

What constitutes a threat?

aberrant or concerning communication or behavior
(suggests a person may intend to harm someone else, or themselves)

What is concerning or aberrant behavior?

Concerning Behavior

Behaviors or communications that cause concern for:
1. The health, safety, or well-being of the subject
2. The health, safety, or well-being of others
3. Both

Aberrant Behavior:

Behavior or communication that is unusual or atypical for the person or situation causes concern for the health, safety, or well-being of the subject, others, or both.

Targeted or Reactive?

REACTIVE
Impulsive

Affective

TARGETED
Premeditated

Predatory

Targeted violence is the result of an understandable, and usually discernible, process of thinking and behavior

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Targeted or Reactive?

Targeted or Reactive?

The primary purpose of a school threat assessment is to prevent targeted violence in schools by students.

A threat may be…

- ❑ spoken, written, gestured, electronic, or other

- ❑ observed by or communicated directly to the target or it may be observed by or communicated to a third party

- ❑ target of the threat does not need to be aware of the threat

- ❑ issued by someone known or unknown to the target

- ❑ might be veiled or not immediately understood BTAM teams

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Share with a neighbor…

One or two things you learned or that stand out to you

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Part II:
Why is behavioral threat assessment and management important?

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It's the law!

SB 213

The school safety plan or emergency operations plan must include the following threat assessment practices:

(i) the adoption of a threat assessment protocol, outlining policies and procedures for implementation when there is notification of a student threat of harm to others or property; and

(ii) an identified threat assessment team, composed of key staff, that meets at least monthly and may include behavioral threat assessment addressing students in need of academic and behavioral supports or interventions.

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Remember...

REMINDER

all behavior is communication

The Current Starte of Student Mental Health

15.08%
Of youth experienced a major depressive episode in 2022.

60%
Of youth with major depression do not receive any mental health treatment.

2.5 million
Youth in the U.S. were diagnosed with severe major depression in 2022.
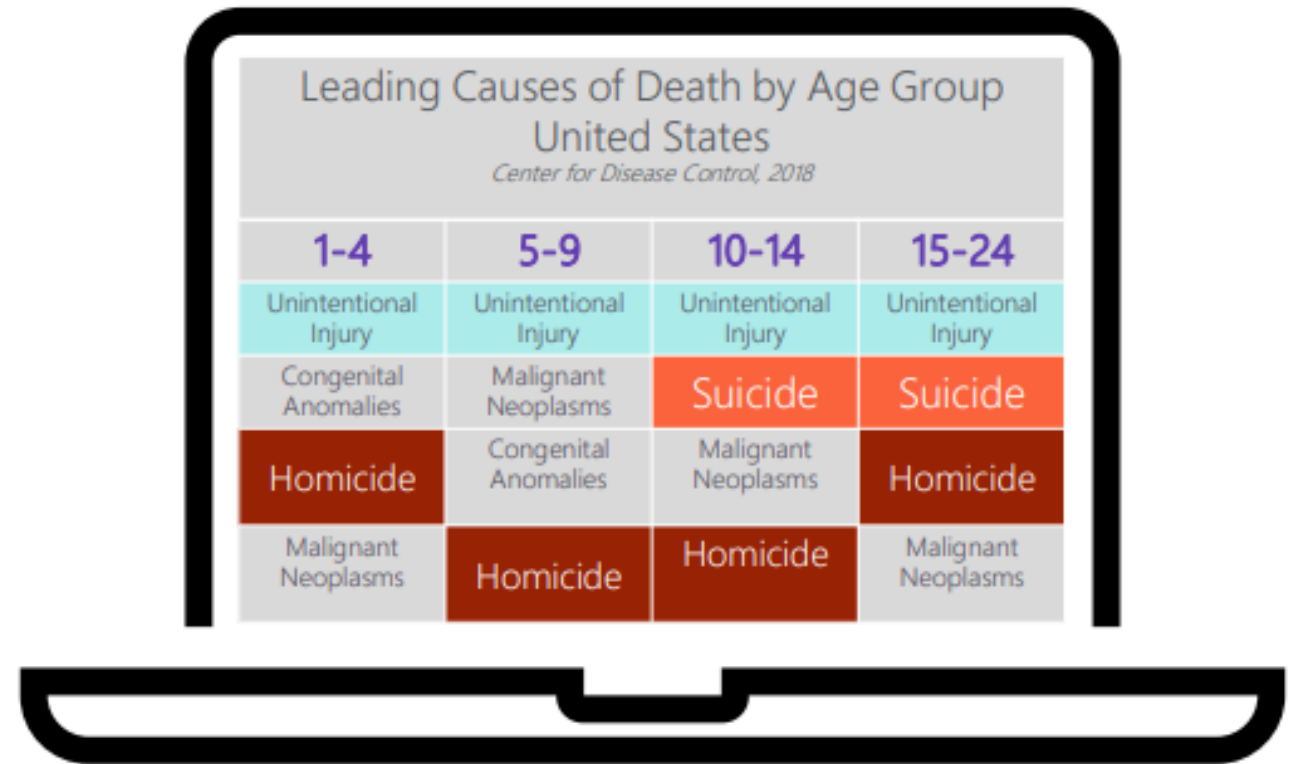
44%
Of students report feeling persistently sad or hopeless.

55%
Of youth report experiencing emotional abuse by a parent or other adult at home.

Mental Health America, 2022 Mental Health in America
CDC, Youth Mental Health Statistics 2022

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Identify Warning Signs Before Harm Occurs

- Suicide and homicide are the 2nd and 3rd leading causes of death amongst most school-aged students

- 76% of attackers exhibit behaviors that elicit concern in others prior to committing an act of violence

Leading Causes of Death by Age Group
United States
Center for Disease Control, 2018

1-4	5-9	10-14	15-24
Unintentional Injury	Unintentional Injury	Unintentional Injury	Unintentional Injury
Congenital Anomalies	Malignant Neoplasms	Suicide	Suicide
Homicide	Congenital Anomalies	Malignant Neoplasms	Homicide
Malignant Neoplasms	Homicide	Homicide	Malignant Neoplasms

Suicide and Montana High Schoolers

2021 MONTANA YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY
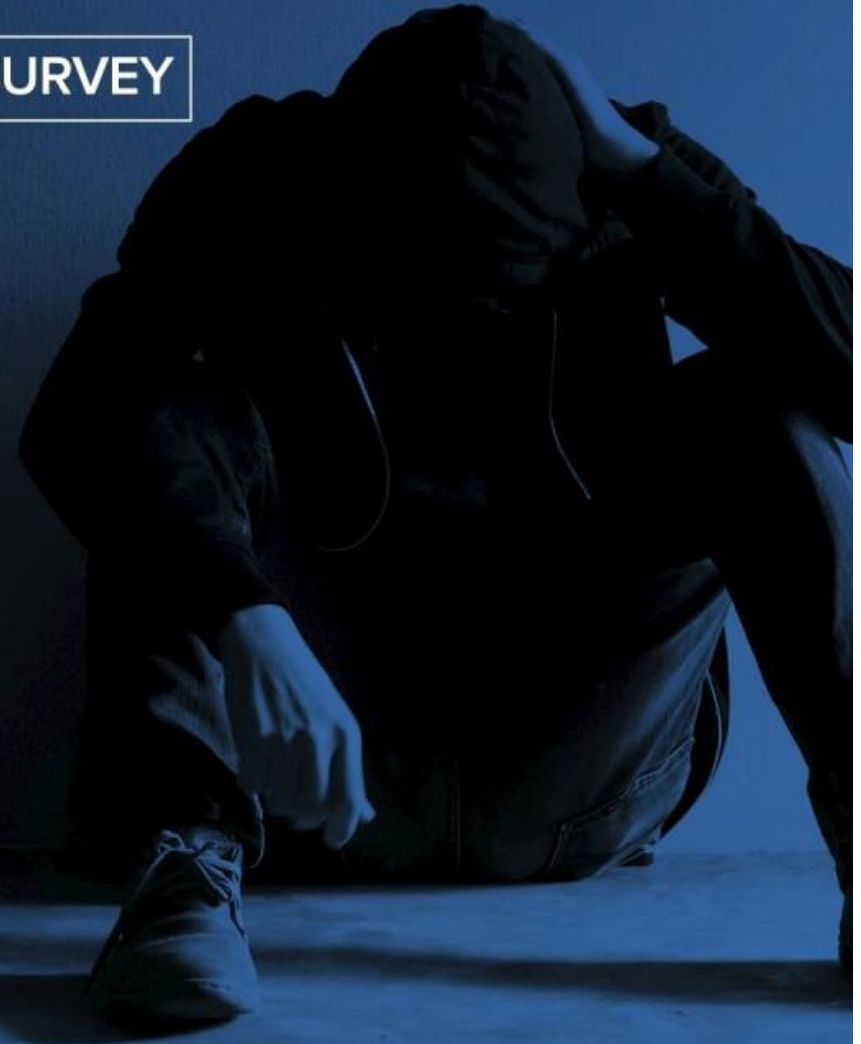SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

21.7%
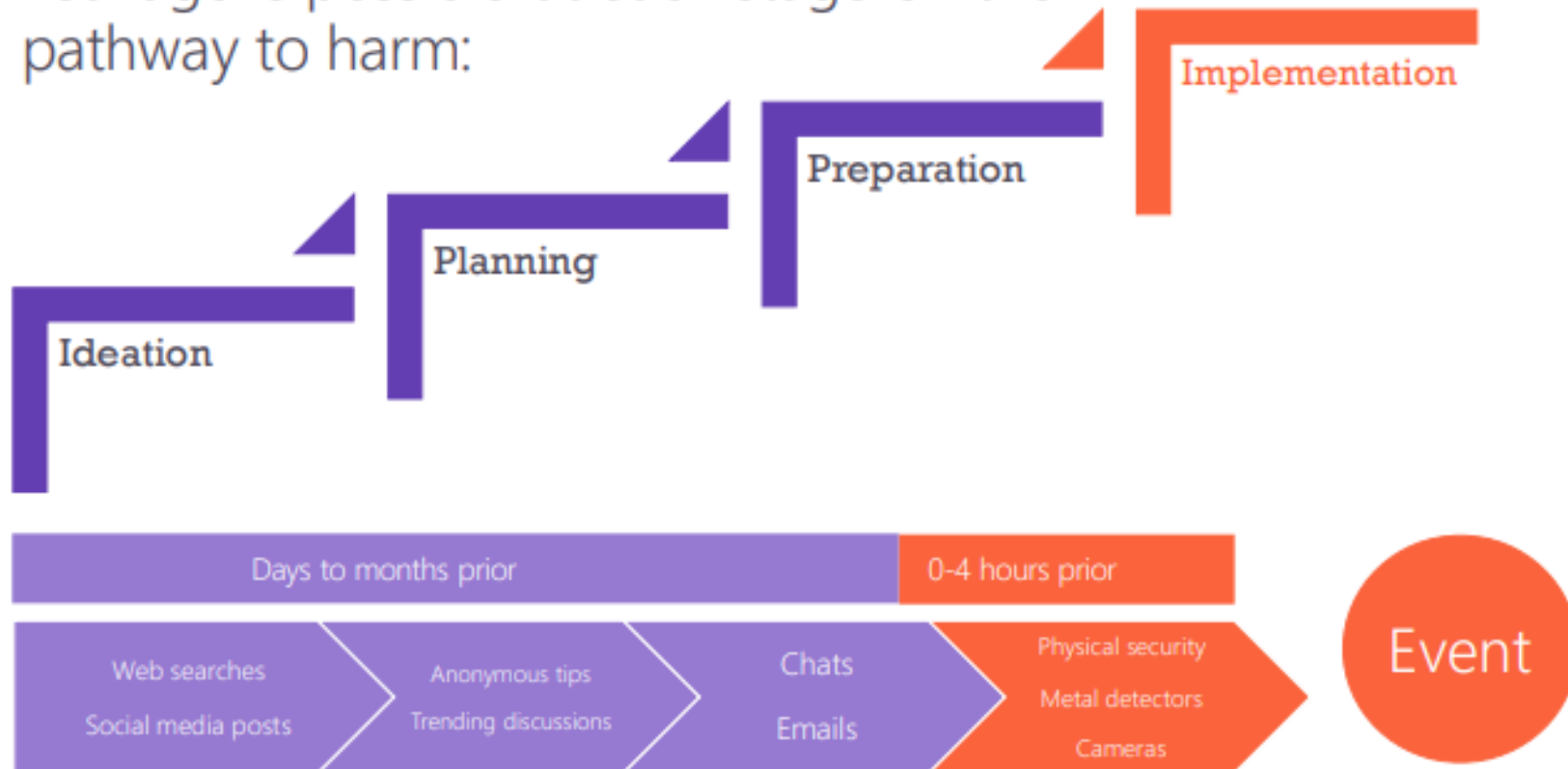Seriously considered suicide

18%
Made a specific plan

10.2%
Attempted suicide

Disrupt the Pathway to Harm by Identifying Leakage

Leakage is possible at each stage on the pathway to harm:

Ideation → Planning → Preparation → Implementation

Days to months prior — 0-4 hours prior — Event

Web searches, Social media posts → Anonymous tips, Trending discussions → Chats, Emails → Physical security, Metal detectors, Cameras → Event

Leakage is a type of warning behavior that may signal the **research, planning,** and **implementation** of an act of violence or harm – primarily digital today.

Meloy, J. R., & O'Toole, M. E. (2011). The concept of leakage in threat assessment. Behavioral Sciences & the Law. DOI: 10.1002/bsl.986; Calhoun, T., & Weston, S. (2003). Contemporary threat management. San Diego: Specialized Training Services; Meloy, J. R., Hoffman, J., et al. (2011). The role of warning behaviors in threat assessment: An exploration and suggested typology. Behavioral Sciences & the Law. DOI: 10.1002/bsl.999

Pathway to Violence

IMPLEMENTATION

PREPARATION

PLANNING

IDEATION

(!) Early identification is critical!

© G. Deisinger, Ph.D. & M. Randazzo, Ph.D

Early Detection is Key to Prevention

In **76%** of violent incidents, someone other than the attacker knew before.

5 out of 7 American teens with mental health needs do not receive needed care.

4 out of 5 teens who attempt suicide have given clear warning signs.

1. https://rems.ed.gov/docs/DOE_BystanderStudy.pdf
2. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm
3. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_878.html

Share with a neighbor…

One or two things you learned or that stand out to you

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Part III:
What is behavioral threat assessment and management?

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Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management… What is it?

BTAM is a fact-based, systematic process designed to **identify, gather information about, assess, and manage** potentially dangerous or violent situations.

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Threat Assessment and Management Goal

The primary goal of the threat assessment and management process is to support and enhance the health, safety, and well-being of the school community.

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Principles of Threat Assessment

- Targeted violence is the result of an **understandable**, and oftentimes **discernible** process of thinking and behavior.

- Targeted violence stems from an interaction between the **subject, target, environment, and precipitating events** (STEP).

- **An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive** mindset is critical to successful threat assessment.

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Principles cont.

- Effective threat assessment is based upon **facts**, rather than **characteristics or traits**.

- A key goal is to distinguish between **MAKING** a threat and **POSING** a threat.

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Threat Assessment Model

Potential Referral Sources

- Student/Teacher/Parent report
- Written or other educational content
- Anonymous reporting tip line
- Social media*
- Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)
- Law enforcement report
- Other

Role of Social Media

What is the latest form of social media your students are using?

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Team Members Gathers Preliminary Info...

About:

- **What** is the threat and **when** did it occur?
- What are the **details about concerns** and **relevant background** about the situation?

Sources of Info:

- Talk with referral source (s), student of concern, teachers
- Brief records review (educational and law enforcement)

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Which is it?

IMPORTANT

If IMMINENT danger to self or others

- Follow district emergency protocols
- Secure the student "subject" (and "target") in a safe setting

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Should we have a screening process?

Depends on details of the threat…

Screening or Full?

Screen

Full Team
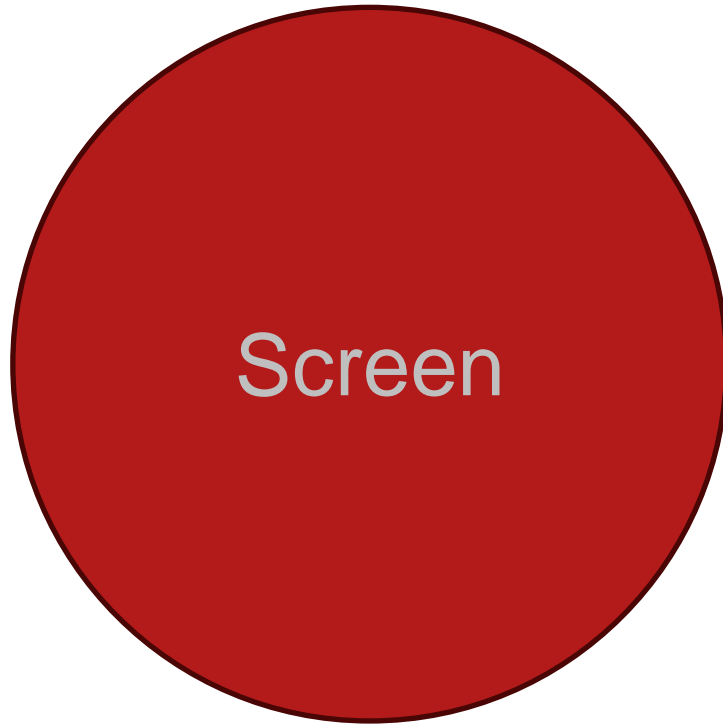
Classifying Threat Levels

Is Threat Assessment Punitive or Preventative?

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management is designed to be fair, objective, reasonable, and timely to prevent violence or harm to self or others where possible

Is Threat Assessment Profiling?

No, Threat assessment is the antithesis of profiling.

Profiling involves making generalizations about an individual based on the individual's similarity to high-risk groups. Threat assessment involves an individualized assessment of the subject of concern, in a particular situation at a particular point in time.

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The Safe Schools Initiative (SSI)

Examined targeted violence from

41 attackers

in 37 incidents

between 1974 and 2000
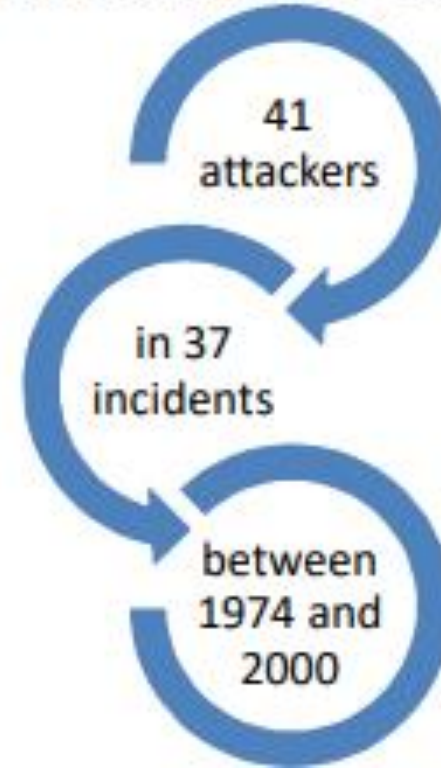
SSI 10 Key Findings – Threat to Others

1. Rarely sudden, impulsive acts

2. Usually others knew about attacker's idea/plan

3. Most did not threaten targets directly prior to attack

4. No accurate or useful profile of "school shooter"

5. Most had difficulties coping with loss/failure

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10 Key Findings (Cont.)

6. Most had concerned others prior to attack

7. Many felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack

8. Prior to the attack, most had access to and had used weapons

9. In more than half the cases, other students were involved

10. Despite prompt law enforcement response, most incidents were stopped by someone other than law enforcement

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Share with a neighbor…

One or two things you learned or that stand out to you

Question…

Does One Person Conduct the Assessment…
Or Is It Done By a Team?

One Person or Team?

Multi-disciplinary teams conduct the threat assessment process.

The superintendent of each school district must establish a threat assessment team from within the school, within the district, or within an educational cooperative of that district.

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Threat Assessment Team

Also known as…

- **Behavior Intervention Team**
- **School Safety Team**
- **School Support Team**

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Building a Threat Assessment Team

A threat assessment team must be creative, flexible, multi-disciplinary, and consultative in nature

- **School/district leaders (administrator, superintendent)**
- **Specialists (school counselor, school psychologist)**
- **School Nurse, or similar**
- **School Resource Officer, or similar**
- **Teacher or staff who has good understanding of student behaviors and social dynamics.**

Role of the Threat Assessment Team

1. Determines if there are threating statements or behaviors that are threatening, aberrant, or concerning.
2. Determines if a person poses a threat to self or others or are they on a pathway to violence.
3. Conducts Screenings and/or Full Team Threat Assessment.
4. Implements a strategy to continue to assess, monitor and manage the case.
5. Violence Prevention

When Does a Threat Assessment Team Meet?

When a threat has been identified

or

Regularly to review possible threats and management plans?

Both

Elements of an Effective Team

- ✓ **Developing basic procedures and guidelines**
- ✓ **Threat Assessment training with tabletop exercises**
- ✓ **Access to consultation with legal**
- ✓ **Record keeping**
- ✓ **Communication with each other, parents and the community**
- ✓ **Forging partnerships with mental health and community resources**
- ✓ **Sharing timely information**

When Does a Threat Assessment Team Meet?

When a threat has been identified

and

At least once a month to review concerns about students on a pathway to violence and monitor management plans

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Part V:
The Brain, Stress, and Threat Assessment: How they all connect

The Brain

A Neuron

Neuron

Dendrites

Soma
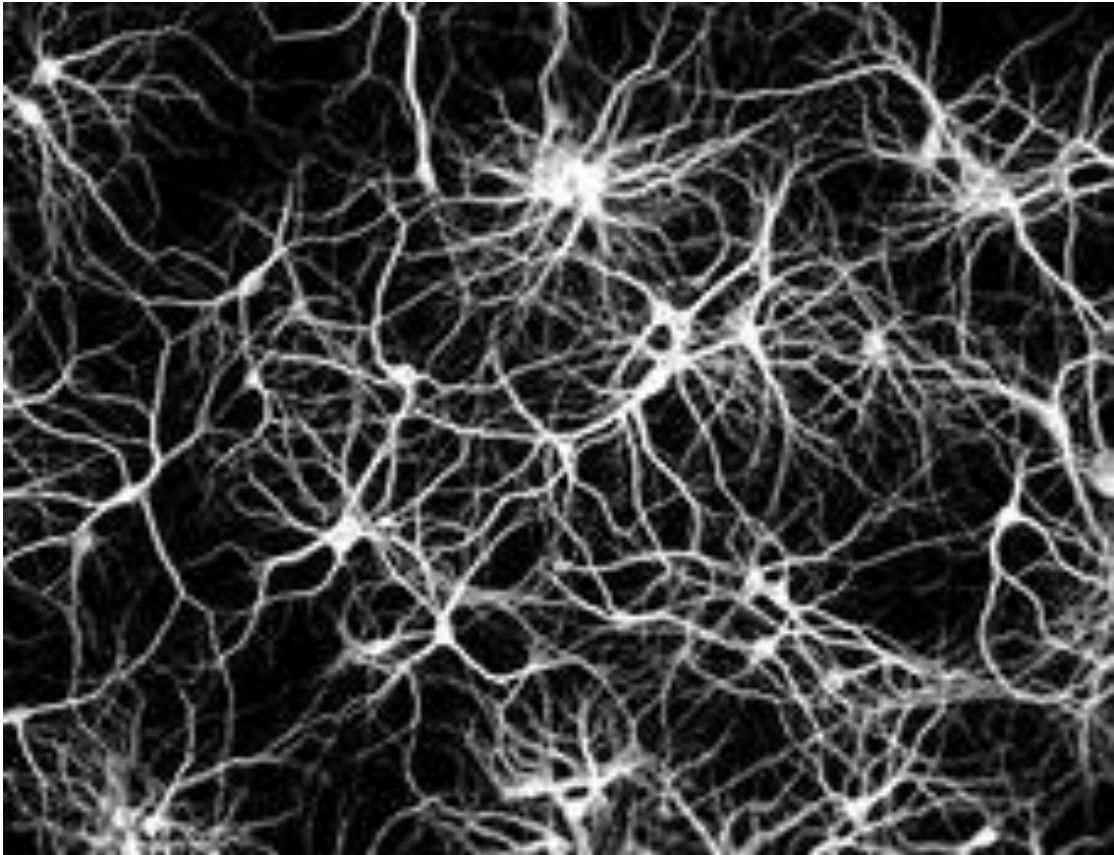
Axon
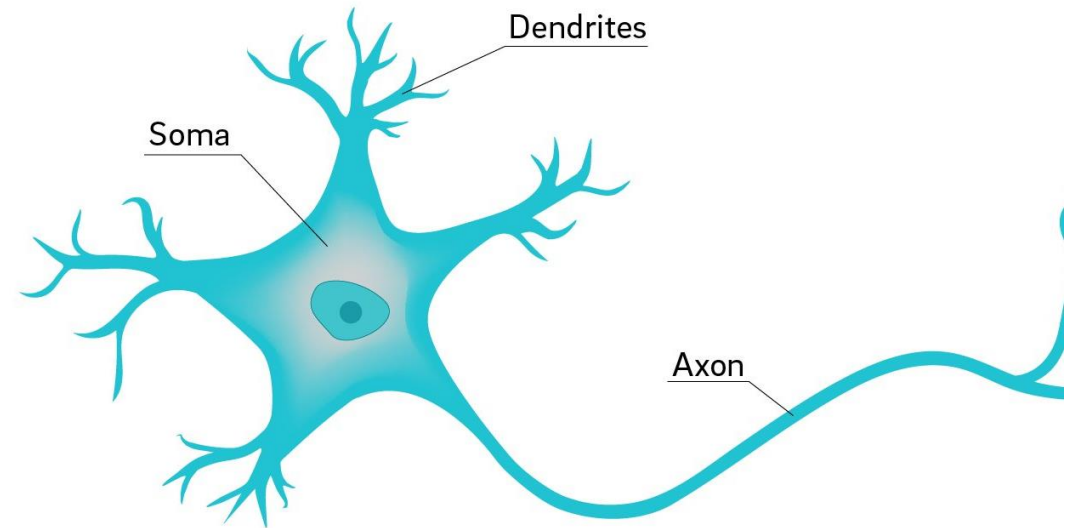
Arborization
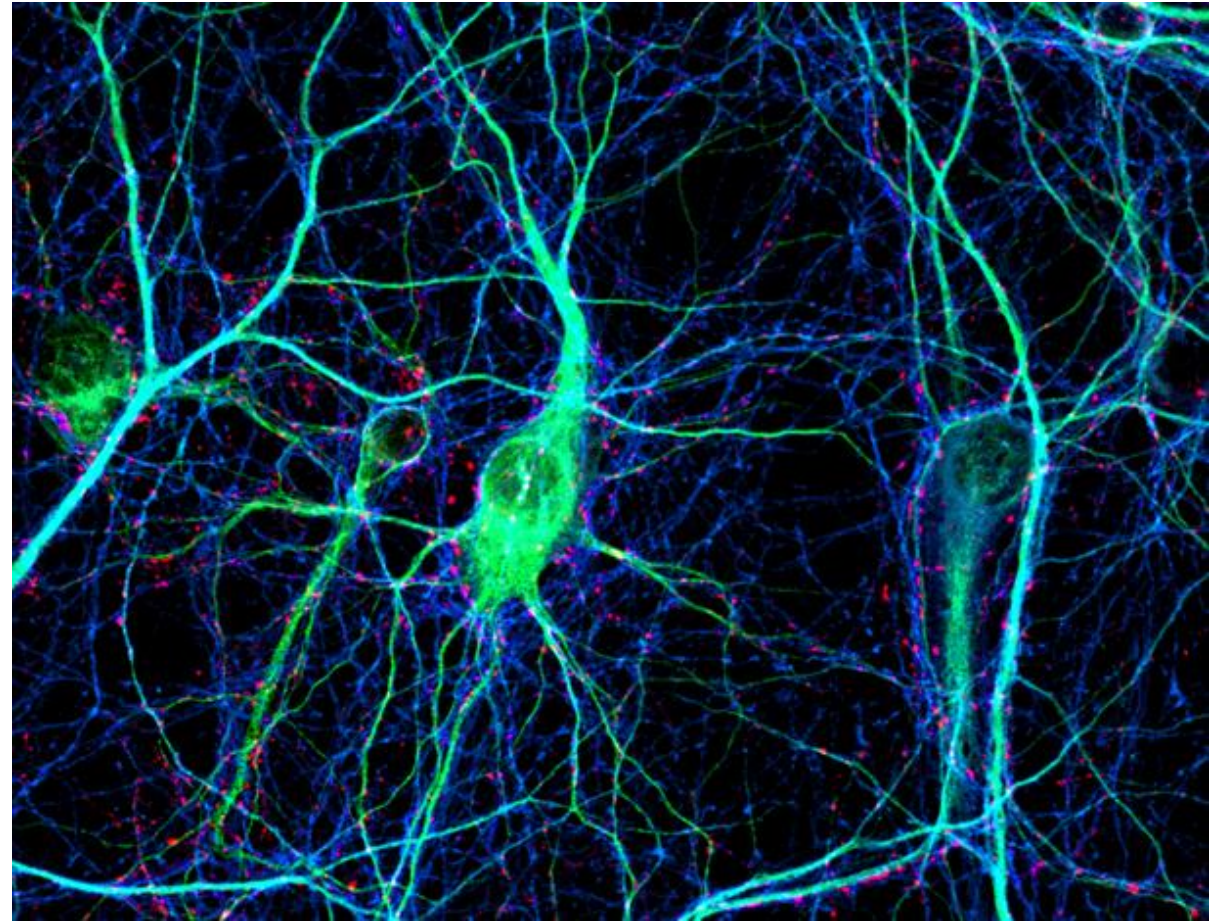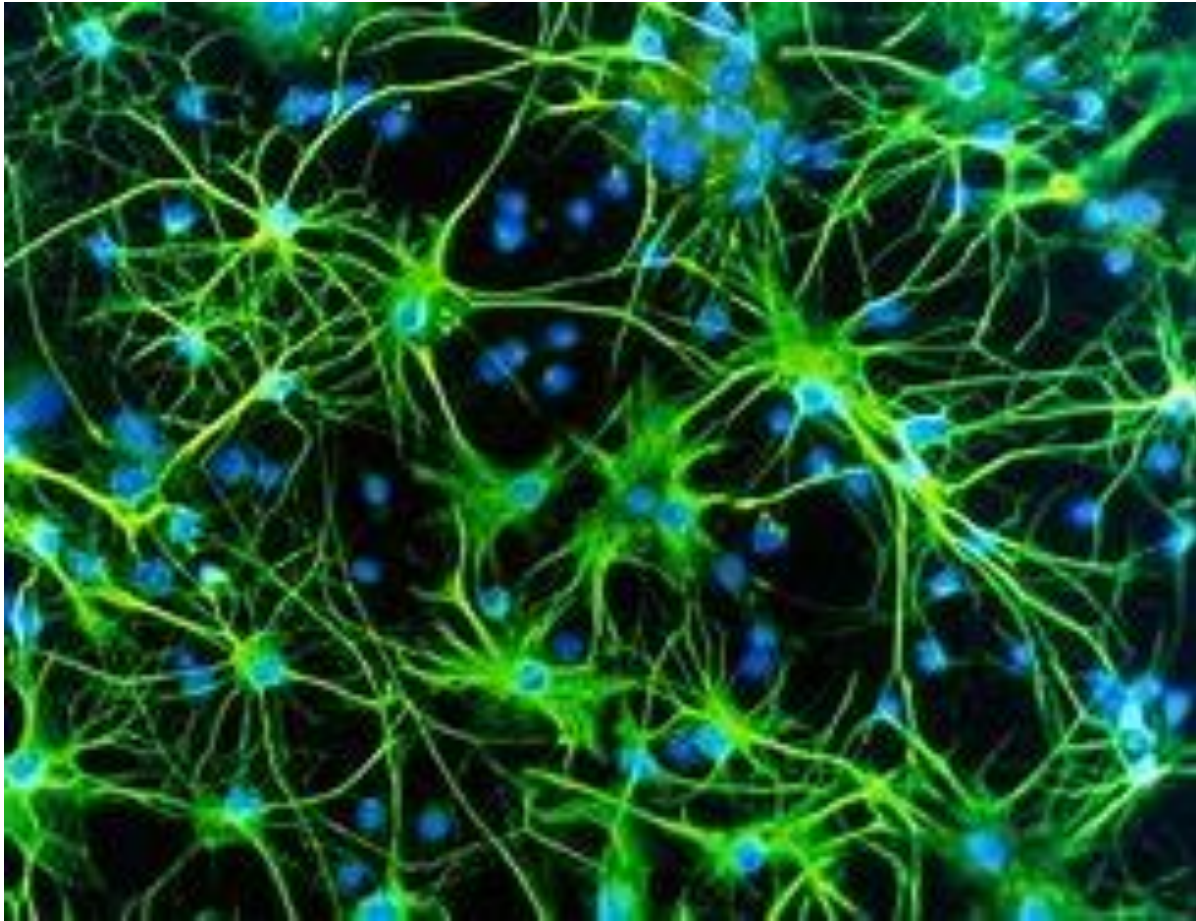
at birth   6 years old   14 years old

Pruning
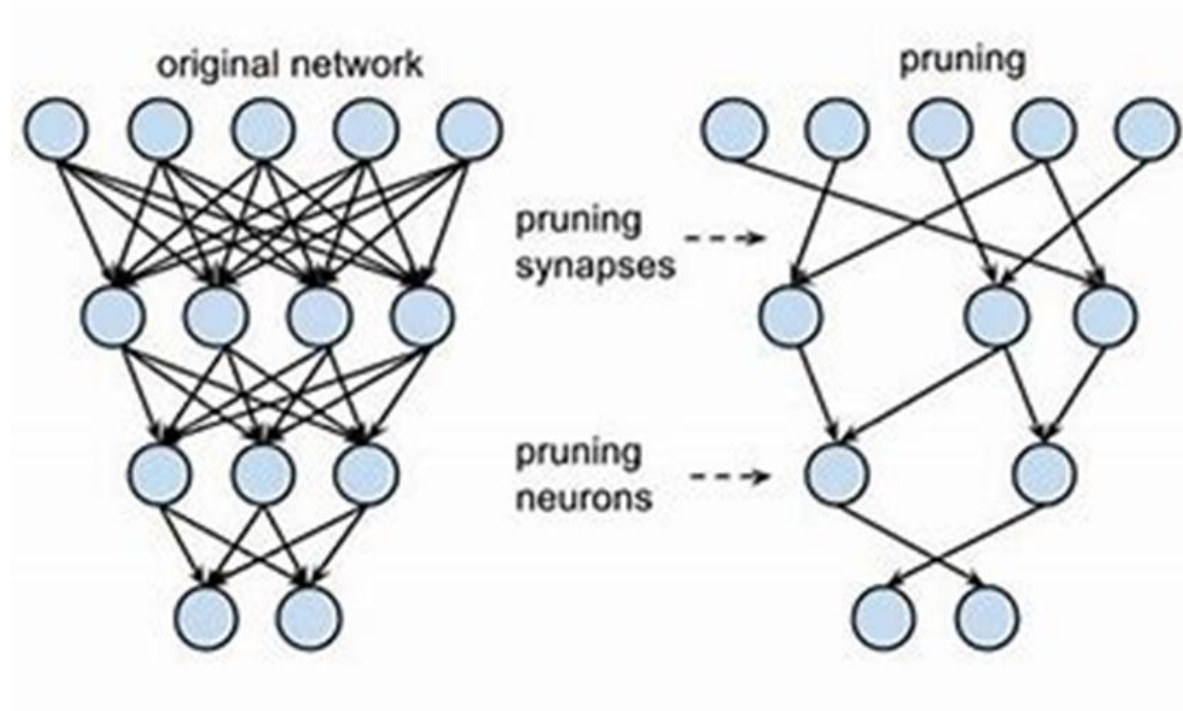
What is it?

The body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response.

Positive Stress

The body's normal and healthy stress response to a tense situation/event.

Example:
First day of school or work.

Tolerable Stress

Activation of the body's stress response to a long-lasting or severe situation/event.

Example:
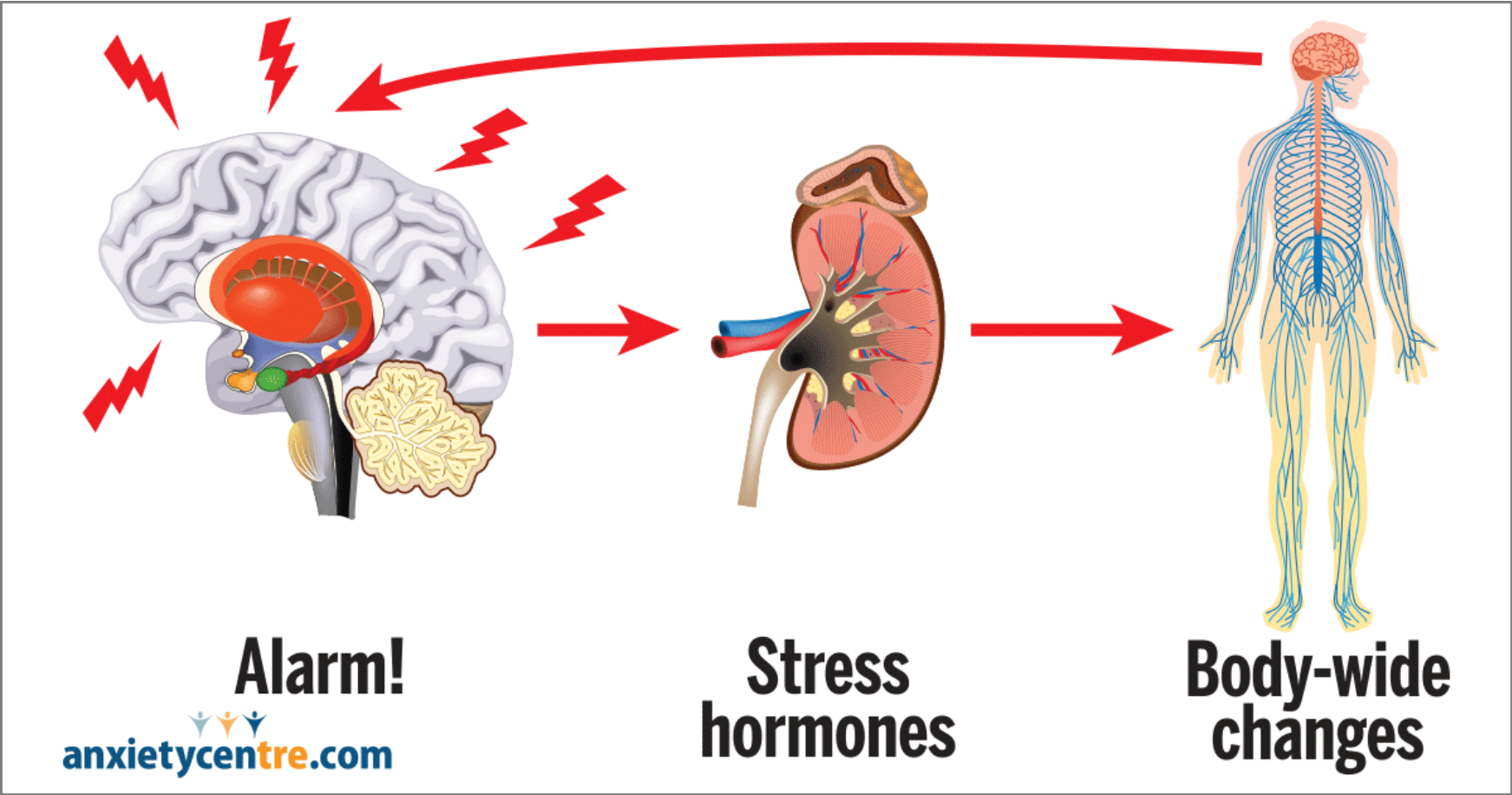Loss of family member, but with supportive buffers in place.

Toxic Stress

Prolonged activation of the body's stress response to frequent, intense situations/events.

Example:
Witnessing domestic violence in the home, chronic neglect.[2]

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Stress - What Happens Internally?

Alarm!

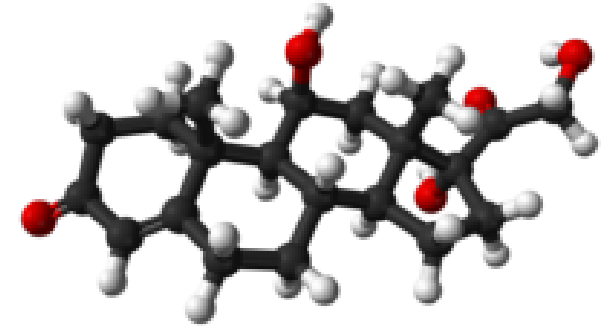anxietycentre.com

Stress hormones

Body-wide changes

Adrenaline

- **Immediate Release**
- **Lasts 5-60 seconds**
- **Blood rushes to your muscles**
- **Burns sugar**
- **Released from the adrenal glands**

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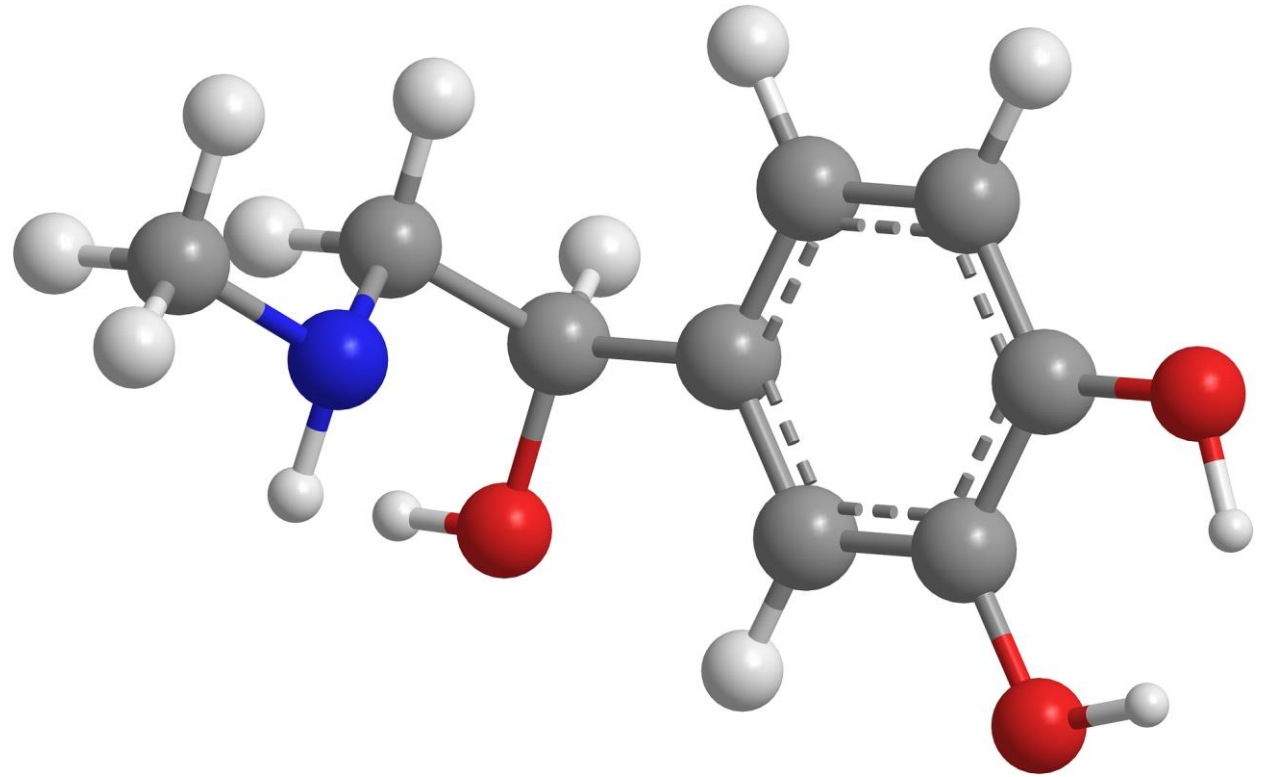
Cortisol

- **Released after Adrenaline**
- **Helps with preparing the body for injury**
- **Shunts blood away from digestive/reproductive organs and diverts to muscles.**

Cortisol

- Manages how your body uses carbohydrates, fats, and proteins
- Keeps inflammation down
- Regulates your blood pressure
- Increases your blood sugar (glucose)
- Controls your sleep/wake cycle
- Boosts energy so you can handle stress and restores balance afterward

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Symptoms of
HIGH CORTISOL LEVELS

WEIGHT GAIN (ESPECIALLY AROUND THE ABDOMEN/STOMACH)

HIGHER SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INFECTIONS

A PUFFY, FLUSHED FACE

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

MOOD SWINGS

ACNE OR OTHER CHANGES IN THE SKIN

INCREASED ANXIETY

HIGHER RISK FOR BONE FRACTURES & OSTEOPOROSIS

FATIGUE/POOR SLEEP (INCLUDING FEELING "TIRED BUT WIRED")

MUSCLE ACHES AND PAINS

INCREASED URINATION

CHANGES IN LIBIDO

IRREGULAR PERIODS & FERTILITY PROBLEMS

EXCESSIVE THIRST

What does Trauma/Stress look like?

When threatened, brain moves resources away from thinking toward survival.

Heightened arousal/emotional state

Hypersensitive to nonverbal; prone to misinterpretation of verbal cues

Our brain learns pattern…

…Fire-together-wire-together.

TRAUMA RESPONSES

FLIGHT
Workaholic
Over-thinker
Anxiety, panic, OCD
Difficulty sitting still
Perfectionist

FIGHT
Anger outburst
Controlling
"The bully"
Narcissistic
Explosive behaviour

FREEZE
Difficulty making decisions
Stuck
Dissociation
Isolating
Numb

FAWN
People pleaser
Lack of identity
No boundaries
Overwhelmed
Codependent

@RYANTHEHOLISTICHEALTHCOACH

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Trauma (and why it relates)

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, emotional or spiritual well-being. (SAMHSA)

- **Series of events = complex, prolonged trauma**

- **Especially damaging as interpersonal violence or violation**

- **3 E's —> Event, Experience, Effect**

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Where is your brain?

Thinking Brain
Upstairs Brain
Ready to Learn

Yellow Zone
Caution area

Feeling Brain
Downstairs Brain
Flipping your lid

1 Adverse Childhood Experiences-Home

- Adults with alcohol and drug use problems
- Parental mental illness
- Domestic violence
- There are adults who have spent time in prison
- Parents have separated
- Emotional and sexual abuse
- Maternal deprivation

2 Adverse Community Experiences

- Lack of social mobility
- Historical trauma
- Structural Racism
- Low socio-economic household
- Poverty
- Violence

3 Environmental

Pandemics
- Covid 19
- SARS

Natural Disasters
- Tornado, Hurricane
- Volcano
- Tsunami
- Earthquake

Climate Crisis
- Heat and drought
- Wild fires/smoke
- Storms and floods

The 3 Realms of Childhood Adverse Experiences

Resources

- **Trauma Aware Schools (https://traumaawareschools.org)**

- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN; https://www.nctsn.org)**

- **National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Program (NTER; DHS; https://www.dhs.gov/national-threat-evaluation-and-reporting-program)**

- **National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA; https://www.nabita.org)**

- **OPI Teacher Learning Hub (https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Teacher-Learning-Hub)**

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Feedback

Montana Safe Schools Center:
https://www.umt.edu/education/specunits/montana_safe_schools_center/

- **SaferMT tip line**
- **REMS Site Assess**
- **Additional training opportunities**

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