



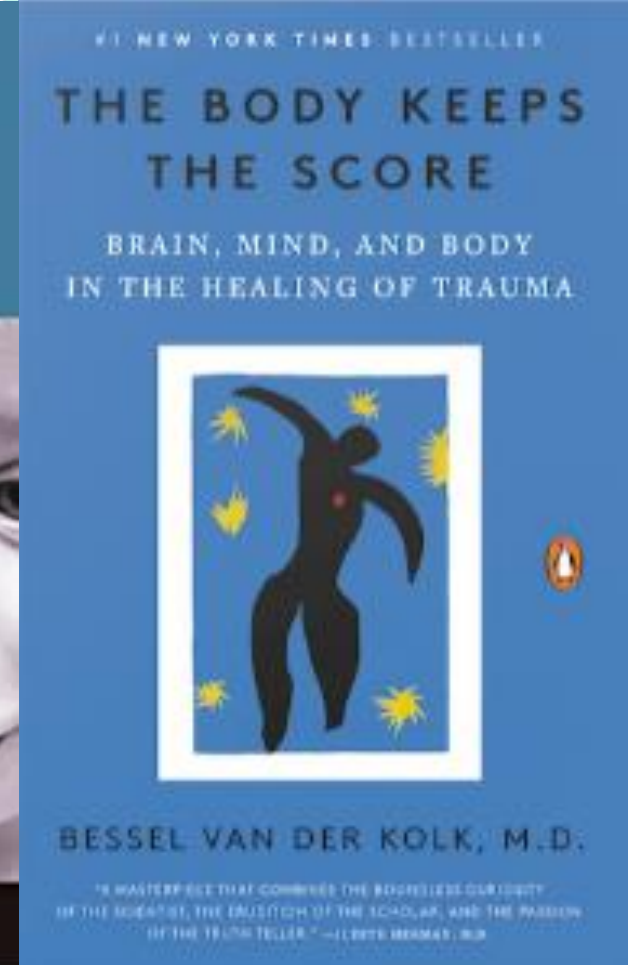
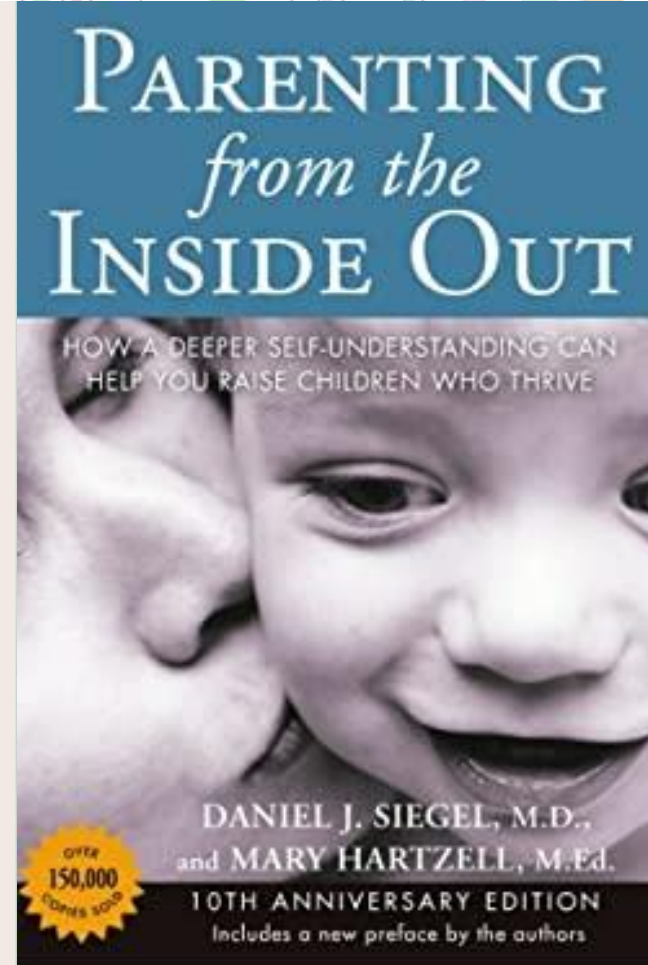
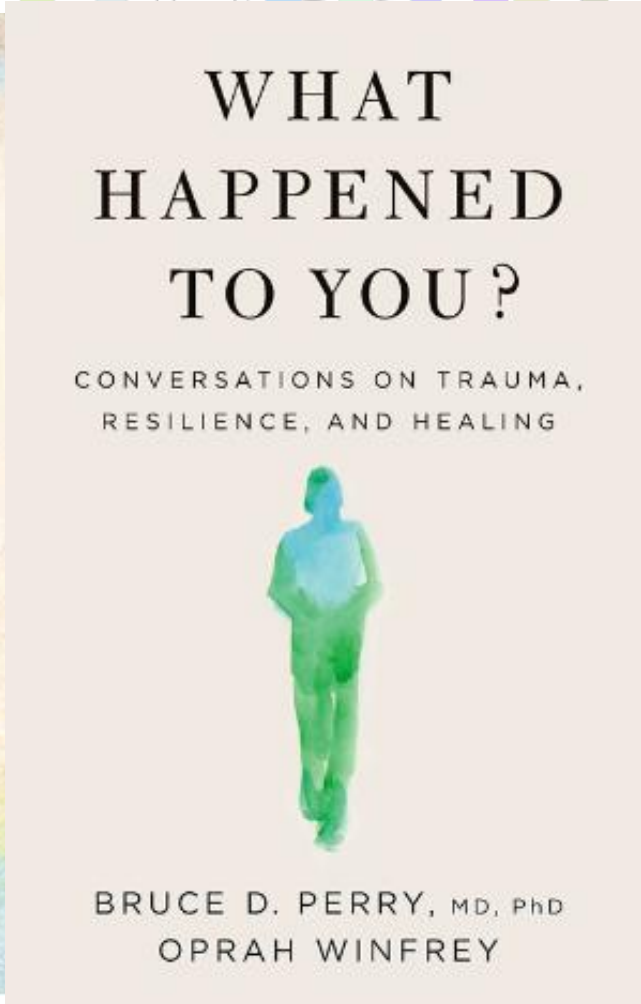
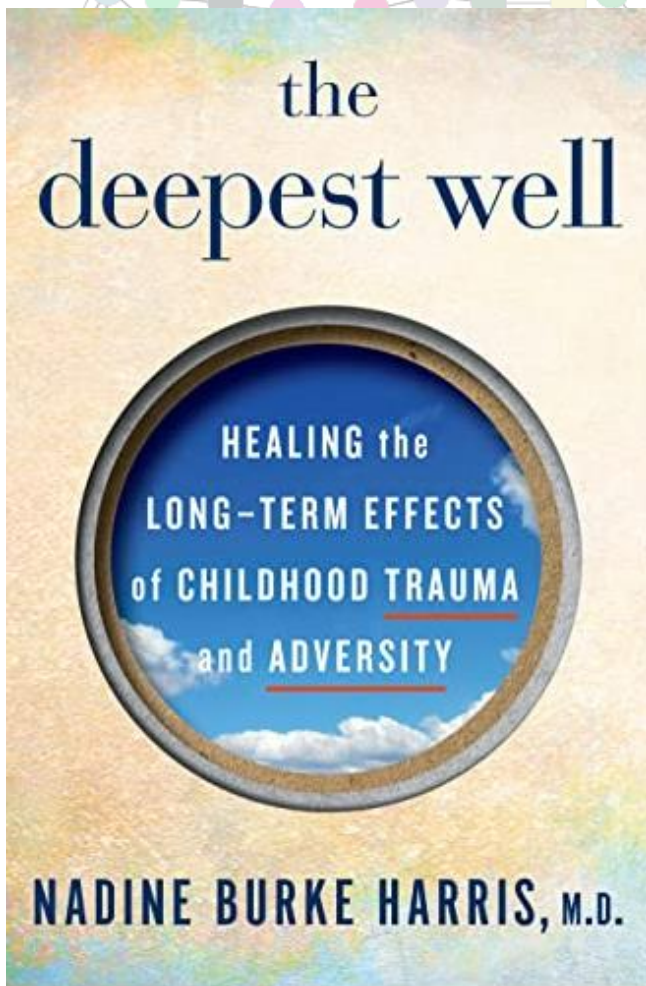
Bringing the Science of ACEs into Education

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MNAFEE 2023

Getting Started

- Google presentation link:
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1REM5Y8pGr2C11l43HhN4NdJImE5Z2et7CMGUiO9lRYk/edit?usp=sharing>
- My introduction
- Who's in the room?
- Session overview
 - Grounding assumptions/ACES Background/Why this matters
 - Action/Problem-solving/Ideas/Discussion

Books that have influenced me...



Underlying Assumptions

1. Mental health is part of well-being and is important at all ages
2. Mental health and physical health interact with each other
3. Mental health crisis globally (some Covid-19 related but many trends happening pre-covid)
4. As a world we need to pay attention to mental health and well-being

Assumptions continued

1. Early positive social and emotional experiences wire the brain for future well-being
2. Parents, caregivers and educators significantly impact child development and child mental health
3. Unpredictable caregiving is very stressful to infants and children and can have long-term impacts in the brain
4. The child's exposure to ACES and the parents'/caregiver's exposure to ACES are both relevant for individual and family well-being

ACES—Adverse childhood experiences

What is adversity for young children? Examples?





Types of ACEs

Abuse

- Emotional
- Physical
- Sexual

Neglect

- Emotional
- Physical

Household Challenges*

- Substance misuse
- Mental illness, including attempted suicide
- Divorce or separation
- Incarceration
- Intimate Partner Violence or Domestic Violence

Other Adversity

- Bullying
- Community violence
- Natural disasters
- Refugee or wartime experiences
- Witnessing or experiencing acts of terrorism

*The child lives with a parent, caregiver, or other adult who experiences one or more of these challenges.

Consequences of Adversity

- Adversity doesn't just happen to children, it happens **inside** them
- Parents often say things like “he doesn't know what's happening” or “she's too young to understand”, but the body knows
- Adversity is a problem for developing brains
- Adversity leads to a damaged stress response

“...the intersection of trauma and the developmentally appropriate egocentrism of childhood often leads a little kid to think *I made it happen*. (Harris p. 101)

Stress Response System

- ACES and trauma manifest in predictable ways that have to do with neurochemistry and neurobiology.
- The body's stress response is designed to help survival.
- We are biologically wired to use flee/fight/freeze.
- Over-activated stress response leads to development of hypervigilance/dissociation.
- Associated with life-long consequences for physical health, mental health, learning and development

ACEs Can Increase Risk for Disease, Early Death, and Poor Social Outcomes

Research shows that **experiencing a higher number of ACEs** is associated with **many of the leading causes of death** like heart disease and cancer.



CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- Asthma
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Cancer
- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity



MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

- Depression



HEALTH RISK BEHAVIORS

- Smoking
- Heavy drinking or alcoholism
- Substance misuse
- Physical inactivity
- Risky sexual behavior
- Suicidal thoughts and behavior



SOCIAL OUTCOMES

- Lack of health insurance
- Unemployment
- Less than high school diploma or equivalent education

ACES and Education

- There is a connection between adversity/stress/trauma and academic performance.
- Kids need pre-frontal cortex for executive functioning (to be able to pay attention, follow directions, remember, learn) but an activated stress response system cuts off communication with the higher parts of the brain and prevents learning/memory/integration.
- When children whose stress response systems are hyperactive or dissociated their higher level brain is not engaged and they cannot learn

Pupil Fair Dismissal Act (PFDA)

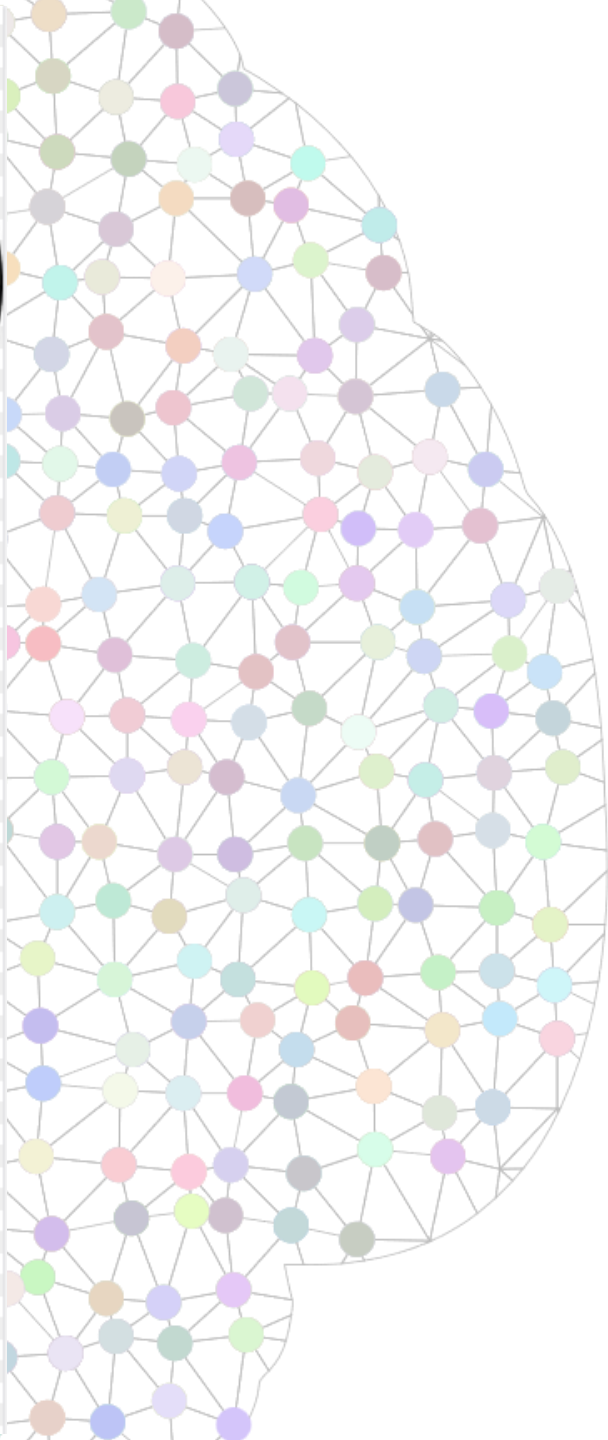
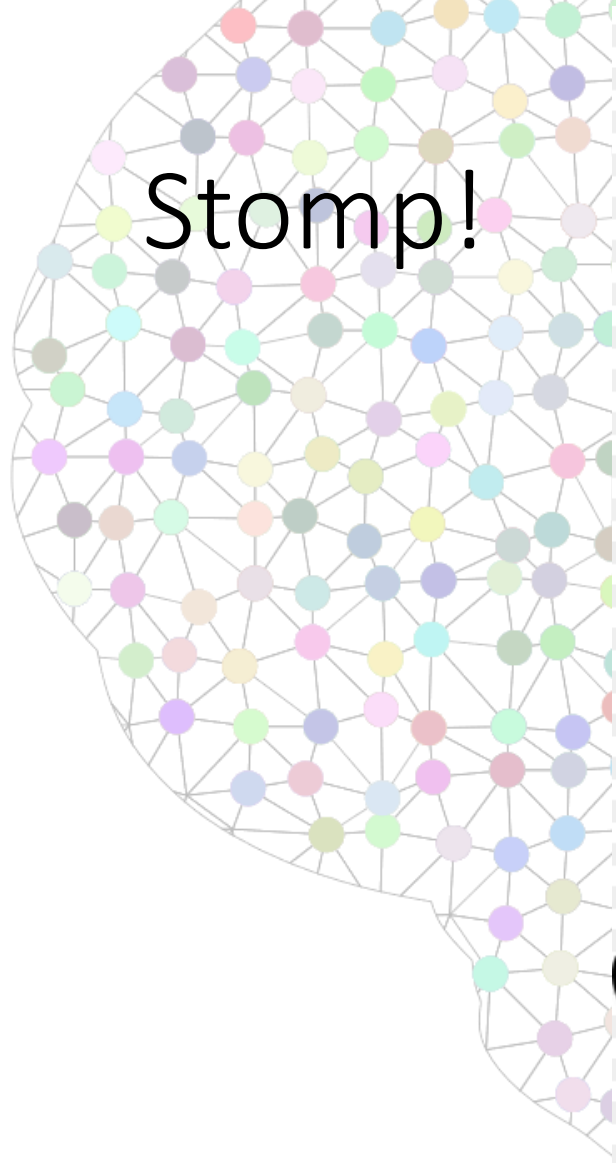
In 2020 MN amended the PFDA to include “prohibiting disciplinary dismissals for students in preschool and prekindergarten programs allowing exceptions for expulsions or exclusions *only* when specified nonexclusionary discipline strategies are exhausted *and* there is “an ongoing serious safety threat to the child or others.”

[Minnesota Laws 2020, Chapter 8, Article 5, Section 1](#)

Misunderstanding stress and trauma associated behaviors leads to mislabeling

- Hypervigilance gets diagnosed as ADHD
- Resistance and defiance of alarm and fear (freeze/dissociation) gets labelled as Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Fight behavior gets students charged with assault
- Can also be more subtle
 - EC/PE Chronic sleep issues can be linked to trauma
 - Parents may bring trauma responses into classrooms—overreaction to a spill or an outburst by their children and/or shuts down

Stomp!



Questions?/Stretch



Action: Directly asking caregivers about ACEs

What are the advantages of directly asking about/addressing ACEs?

What are the barriers to this approach?

Ways to overcome barriers?

Positive ACEs and Related Life Events Screening (PEARLS)
CHILD - To be completed by caregiver

As any part of your child's care team, you are encouraged to ask about these experiences. This screening is designed to help you identify children who may be at risk for poor health outcomes. It is not a diagnostic tool. If you identify a child who may be at risk, please discuss this with your child's healthcare provider.

PART 1

1. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
2. Do you think your child has had a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
3. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
4. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
5. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
6. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
7. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
8. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
9. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?
10. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who was in prison or jail?

Measuring Your ACE Score

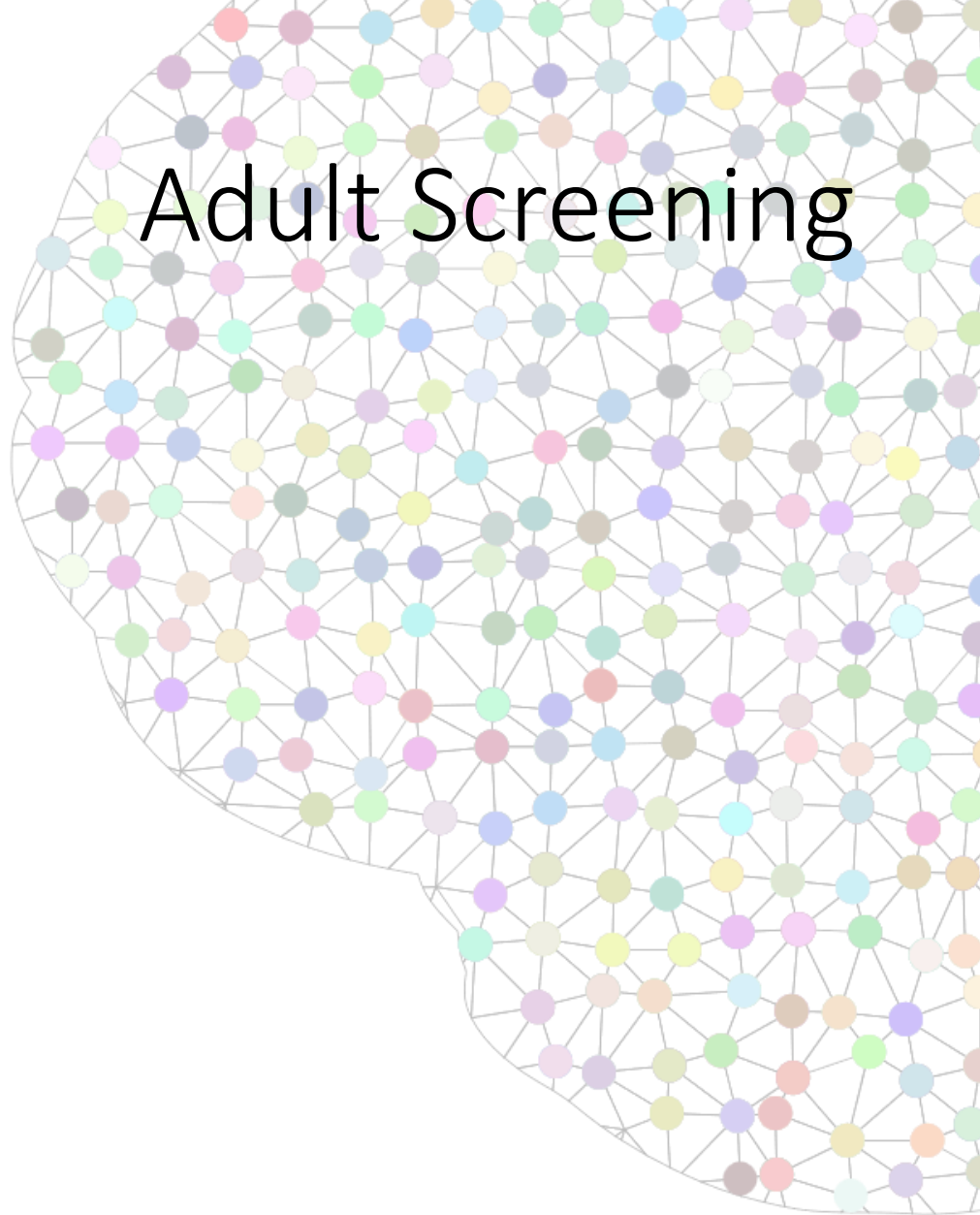
Did a parent or other adult in your home ever: (check all that apply)

1. Get drunk or high too often or to the point of danger?
2. Get violent or scary? (Did you ever have to hide or run away from your home?)
3. Get married or divorced or separated or widowed?
4. Get remarried or live with a new partner?
5. Get pregnant or have a child?
6. Get pregnant or have a child?
7. Get pregnant or have a child?
8. Get pregnant or have a child?
9. Get pregnant or have a child?
10. Get pregnant or have a child?

TOTAL ACE SCORE
Count the number of "Yes" answers. Your score is: _____

PART 2

1. Has your child ever seen, heard, or been a victim of violence in your neighborhood, community, or school?
2. Has your child experienced discrimination?
3. Has your child ever had problems with housing?
4. Have you ever worried that your child did not have enough food to eat or that the food for your child would run out before you could buy more?
5. Has your child ever been separated from their parent or caregiver due to foster care, or immigration?
6. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who had a serious physical illness or disability?
7. Has your child ever lived with a parent or caregiver who died?



Adult Screening

Finding Your ACE Score

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:		Yes	No
1.	Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever ... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Was a family member: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at him/her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Did a household member go to prison?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOTAL ACE SCORE Each answer of 'Yes' is scored as a '1'. Count the total number of 'Yes' responses.			

Your ACE Score is: _____

Pediatric ACEs and Related Life Events Screener (PEARLS)

CHILD - To be completed by: **Caregiver**

At any point in time since your child was born, has your child seen or been present when the following experiences happened? Please include past and present experiences.

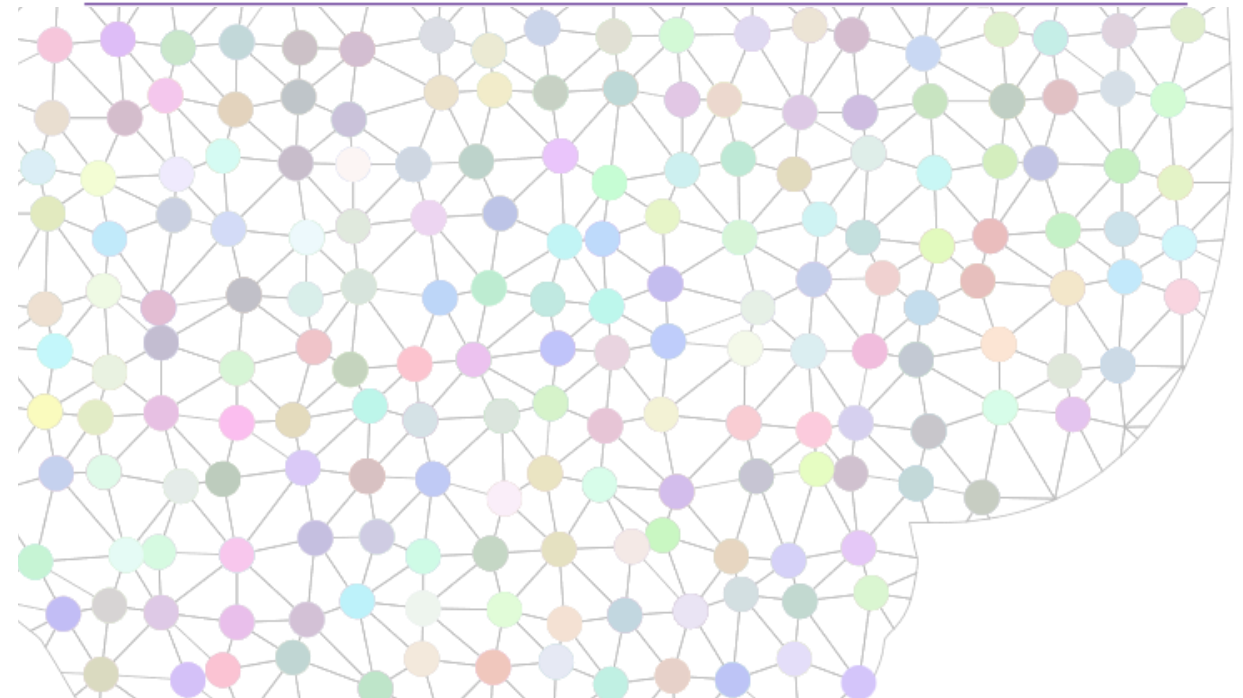
Please note, some questions have more than one part separated by "OR." If any part of the question is answered "Yes," then the answer to the entire question is "Yes."

PART 1:

1. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who went to jail/prison?
2. Do you think your child ever felt unsupported, unloved and/or unprotected?
3. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who had mental health issues?
(for example, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD, or an anxiety disorder)
4. Has a parent/caregiver ever insulted, humiliated, or put down your child?
5. Has the child's biological parent or any caregiver ever had, or currently has a problem with too much alcohol, street drugs or prescription medications use?
6. Has your child ever lacked appropriate care by any caregiver?
(for example, not being protected from unsafe situations, or not cared for when sick or injured even when the resources were available)
7. Has your child ever seen or heard a parent/caregiver being screamed at, sworn at, insulted or humiliated by another adult?
Or has your child ever seen or heard a parent/caregiver being slapped, kicked, punched beaten up or hurt with a weapon?
8. Has any adult in the household often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped or thrown something at your child?
Or has any adult in the household ever hit your child so hard that your child had marks or was injured?
Or has any adult in the household ever threatened your child or acted in a way that made your child afraid that they might be hurt?
9. Has your child ever experienced sexual abuse?
(for example, anyone touched your child or asked your child to touch that person in a way that was unwanted, or made your child feel uncomfortable, or anyone ever attempted or actually had oral, anal, or vaginal sex with your child)
10. Have there ever been significant changes in the relationship status of the child's caregiver(s)?
(for example, a parent/caregiver got a divorce or separated, or a romantic partner moved in or out)

PART 2:

1. Has your child ever seen, heard, or been a victim of violence in your neighborhood, community or school?
(for example, targeted bullying, assault or other violent actions, war or terrorism)
2. Has your child experienced discrimination?
(for example, being hassled or made to feel inferior or excluded because of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, learning differences, or disabilities)
3. Has your child ever had problems with housing?
(for example, being homeless, not having a stable place to live, moved more than two times in a six-month period, faced eviction or foreclosure, or had to live with multiple families or family members)
4. Have you ever worried that your child did not have enough food to eat or that the food for your child would run out before you could buy more?
5. Has your child ever been separated from their parent or caregiver due to foster care, or immigration?
6. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who had a serious physical illness or disability?
7. Has your child ever lived with a parent or caregiver who died?



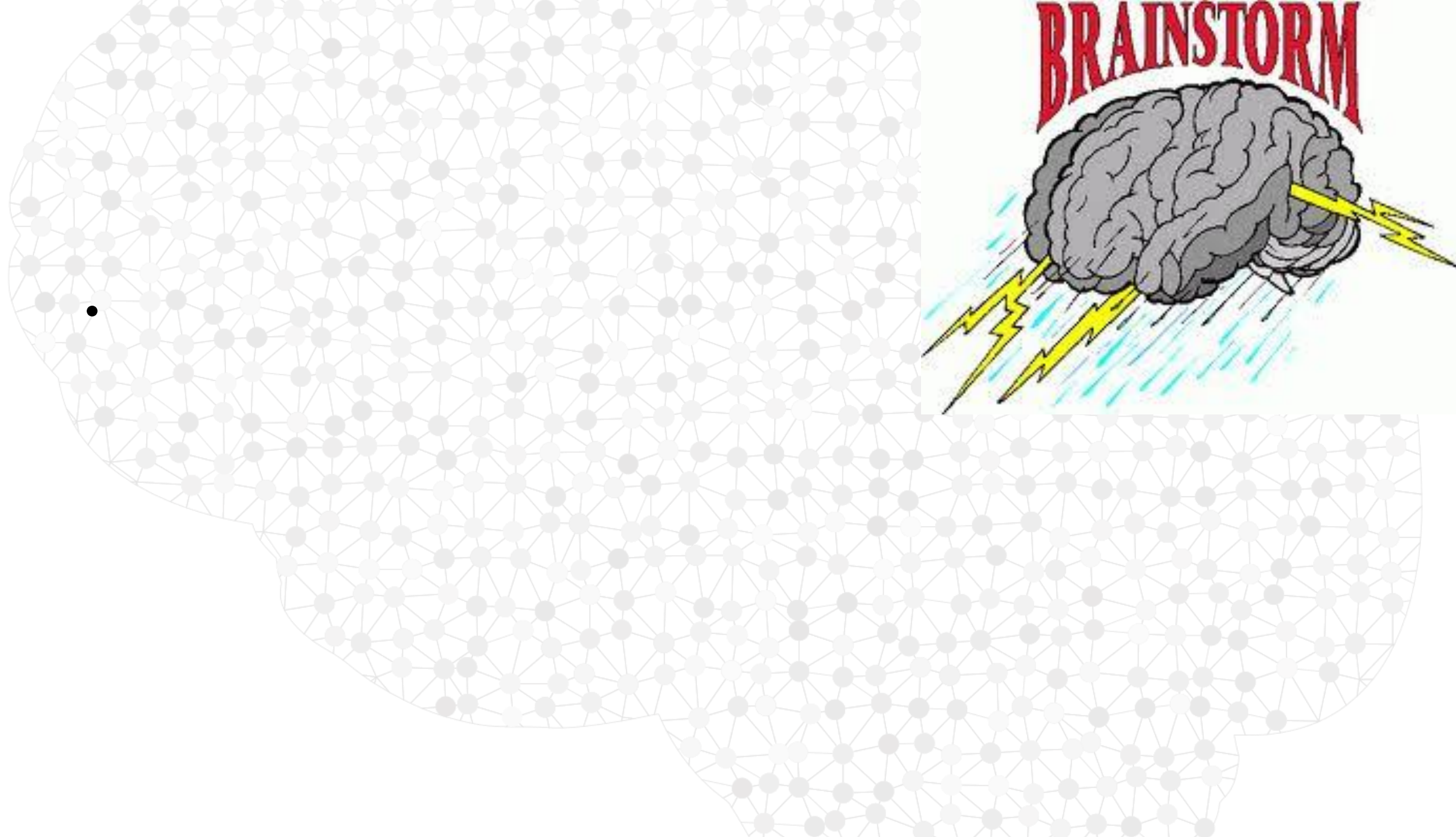
Barriers

- Stigma/don't think parents will be honest
- None of my business/too private
- Not my role
- Not sure how to deal with people who are triggered/get in over my head/get triggered myself
- Not relevant to the parents work with/working in a high income district
- Rather talk about trauma more generally/ACES does not cover all trauma and other toxic stress



Problem-solving

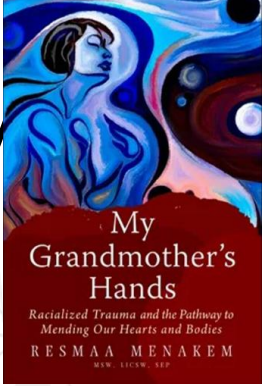
- Implement universal screenings for EC to normalize the conversation
- Give parent time to read/process and/or provide in multiple languages
- Don't have children translate for parents
- Show list but do not ask people to tell you which ACES (and maybe not even how many)
- Simply plant the idea that individuals/families could talk to someone
- Talk about trauma/ACEs in PE classes in a general way
- Do not assume that because you work in a privileged community that nobody has high ACE scores
- Give caregivers multiple opportunities to see/discuss/come forward
- What else?

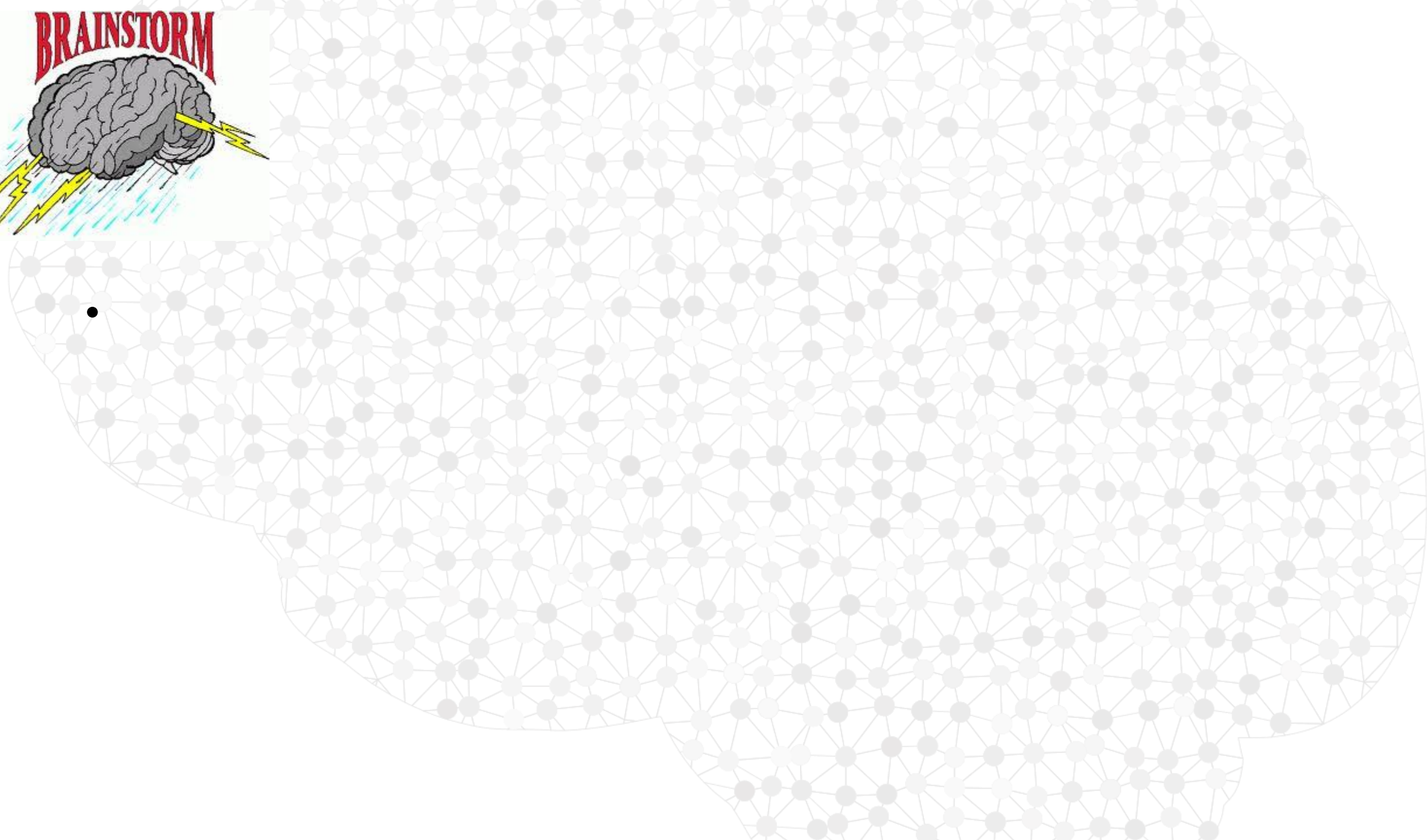


Action: Assume that lots of parents/children/staff have trauma in background

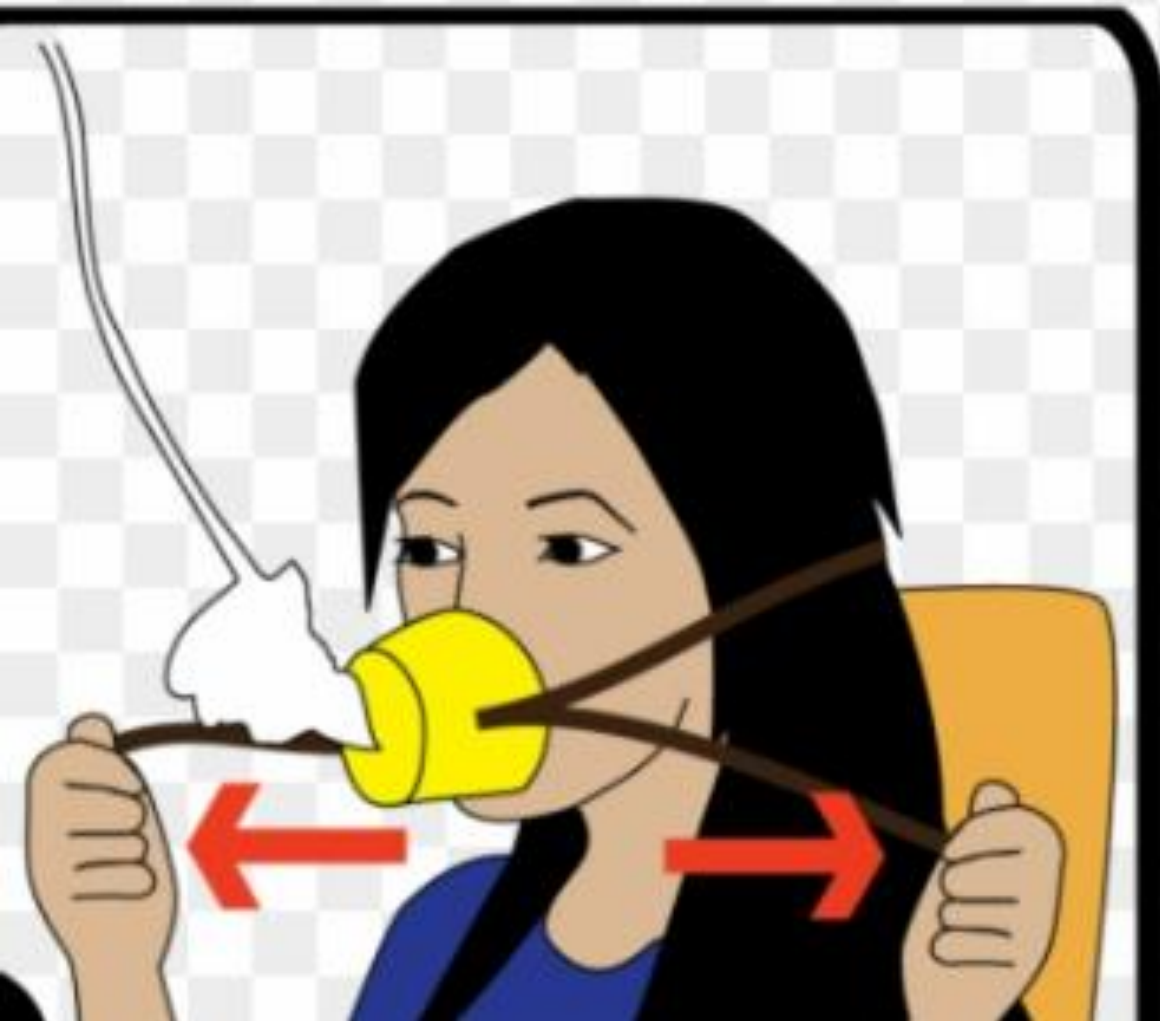
- There is an argument that we ALL have trauma backgrounds
- Incorporate trauma informed practice into regular routines.
- For example, activities that promote mind/body connection can help with regulation/integration whether you have an immediate trauma background or not (meditation, yoga, positive imagery, breathing exercises, etc...)

What are the advantages of this approach?
What specifically can you do?





Value of self-care



Value of 2-5 minutes





Music/dancing/movement/rhythm

are all common parts of indigenous/traditional cultures

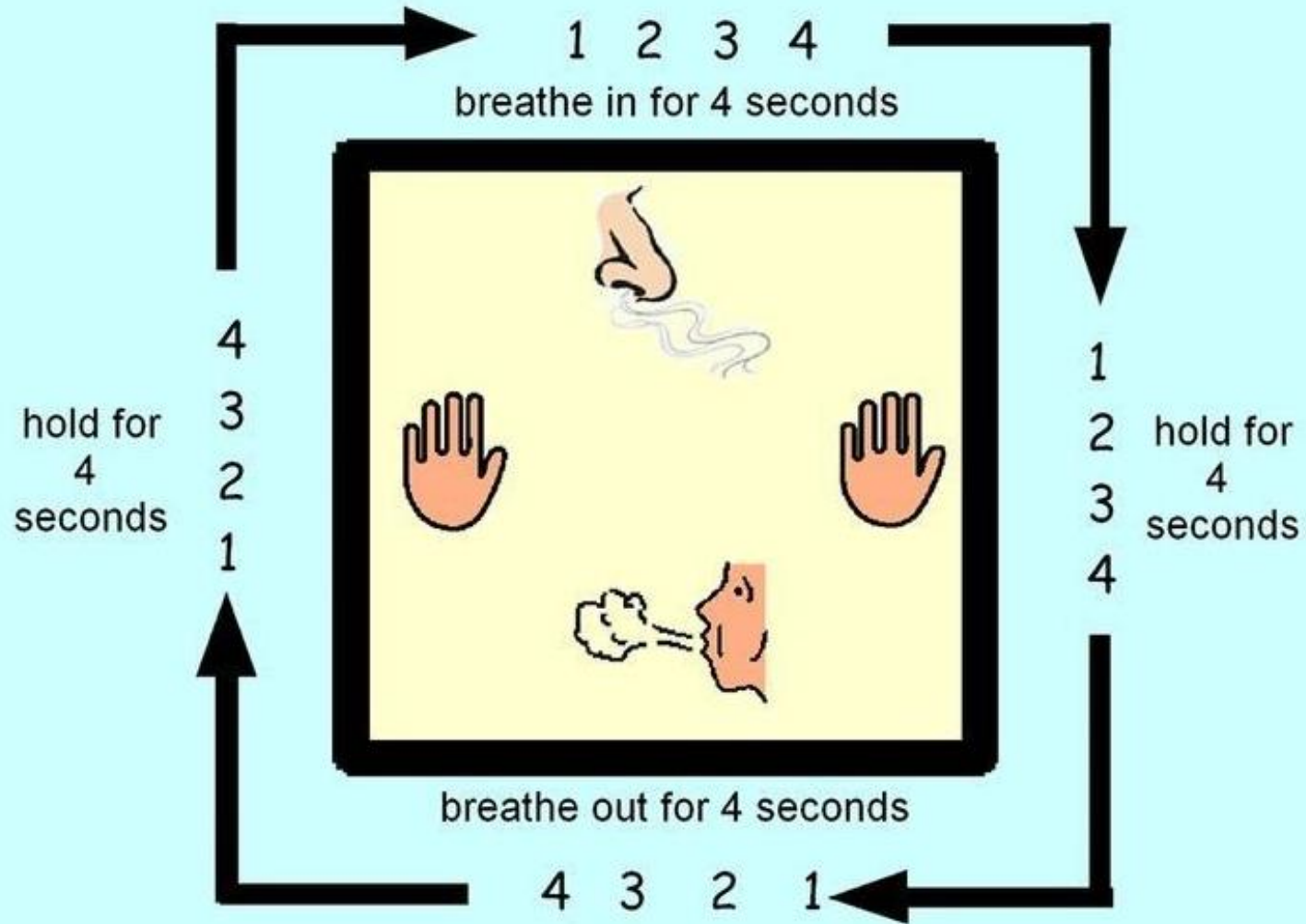
- Call and response as a method of learning
- Rhythmic music can be very regulating
 - Discordant music might not be welcomed
 - It is developmentally appropriate to have children move around and make noise in an early childhood classroom, remember that some children may find it dysregulating.
 - Ideas to balance both needs?

Power of positive implicit memory

- Tap into the senses
- Having families identify “Songs of care”
- Caregiver heartbeat can be very regulating for an infant/young child. Can record heartbeat with phone microphone
- Sensory play opportunities (both parents and children)
- Forest bathing/nature activities
- “Aromatherapy”
- Other examples?



SQUARE BREATHING





Other Ideas

- Positive imagery/grounding exercises (beginning/during transitions)
 - Brain gym activities/crossing the midline activity with hands and feet
- 



Final thoughts and discussion...

The healthier parents get, the healthier their children may also get
(Harris p. 107)

Resources

Aces Aware <https://www.acesaware.org/>

CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>

Turnaround for children <https://turnaroundusa.org/>

Activating the brain with movement breaks <https://youtu.be/SsKLihqkcd0>

Murphey, D. & Sacks, V. (2019). Supporting Students with Adverse Childhood Experiences: How educators and schools can help.

https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2019/murphey_sacks

Music Therapy Works. <https://www.musictherapyworks.co.uk/music-resources-for-home-learning>