

HEALING, RESILIENCE, AND POST-TRAUMATIC WISDOM



WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

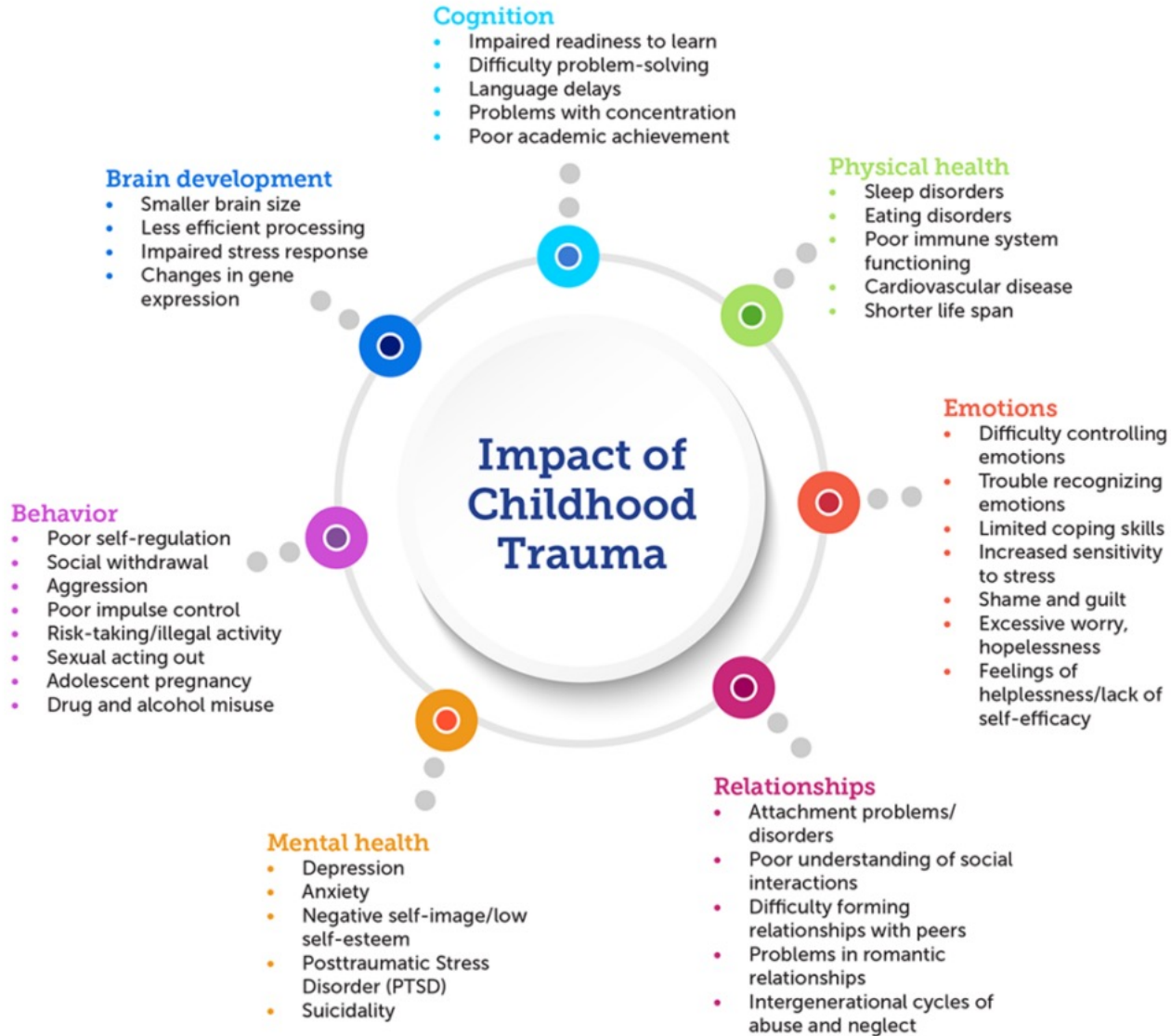
CONVERSATIONS ON TRAUMA,
RESILIENCE, AND HEALING



BRUCE D. PERRY, MD, PhD
OPRAH WINFREY



Impact of Childhood Trauma



CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

- 'The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others.' Judith Herman
- 'Developmental trauma can disrupt our ability to form and maintain relationships.' Bruce D. Perry
- Trauma can lead to a dysregulated brain, which can result in hyper-vigilance, fear, hyper-reactivity, and dissociation.
- The person may lose their ability to trust, avoid intimacy, may feel they have no identity, and experience feelings of shame and guilt.

HEALING/RECOVERY

- Recovery is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections.
- Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.
- 'I alone can do it, but I can't do it alone.'
- 'The first task of recovery is to establish the survivor's **safety**. This task takes precedence over all others...' Judith Herman
- Empowerment comes from a person gaining hope, understanding, and a sense of belonging (safety).

CREATING UNDERSTANDING AND HOPE

'... people feel incredibly relieved when they get an explanation of how their brain is working, and why. We don't give them a psychiatric label. We're just saying this is the way you're organized and it's absolutely predictable based upon *what happened to you*. Then we help them understand that the brain is malleable, "plastic", changeable. And together we come up with a plan that will help change some of the systems that appear to be causing them problems.' **Bruce D. Perry**

UNDERSTANDING

- Learn how the brain works and why (e.g., how developmental experiences impact, toxic experiences -> dysregulation).
- Understand that the brain is malleable, 'plastic', changeable. (Healing is possible.)
- Understand the importance of regulation, rhythm, repetition, relationships, reward, resilience, and reciprocity.
- Understand the importance of 'safety', empathy, 'being present', and other factors that facilitate healing.

UNDERSTANDING

- The traumatised person must be the author and arbiter of their own recovery. Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure.
- 'Good therapists were those who really valued my experience, and helped me to control my behavior rather than trying to control me.'
Incest Survivor
- The survivor should be consulted about their wishes and offered as much choice as is compatible with the preservation of safety.

SAFETY

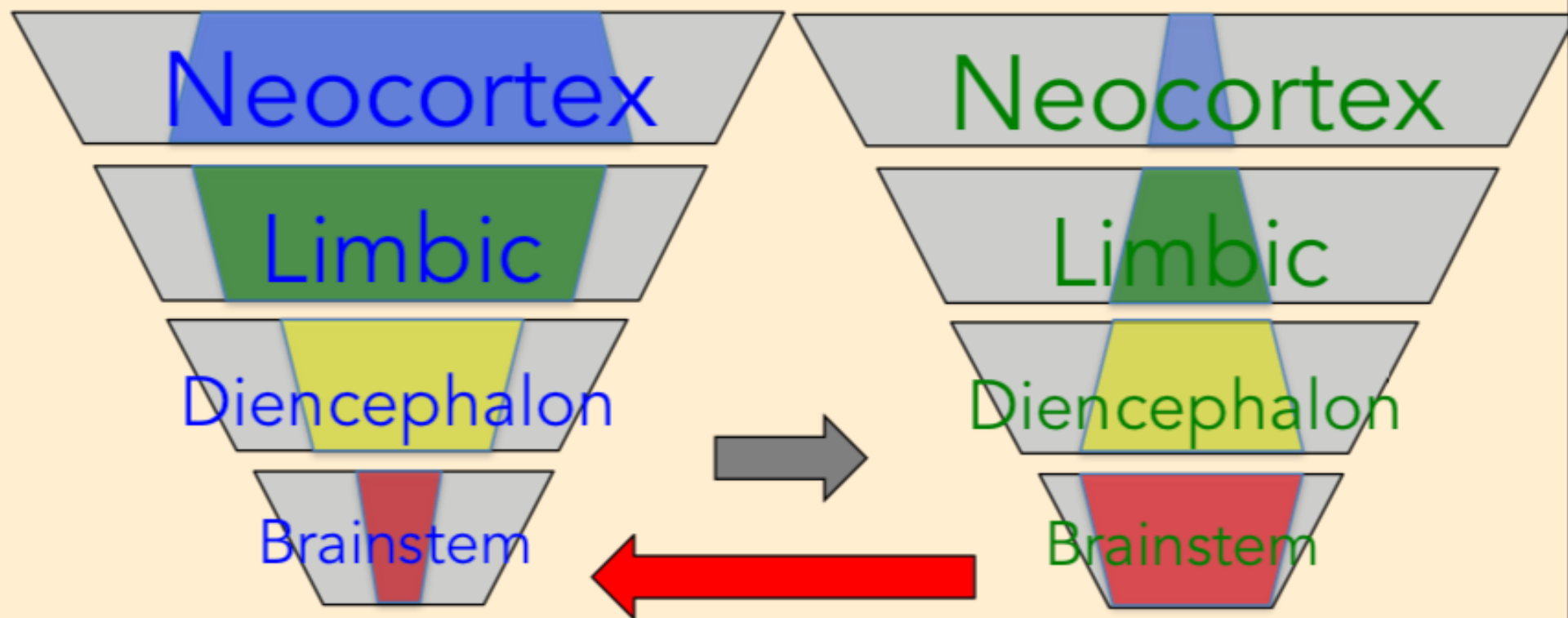
- 'Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.' Bessel van der Kolk
- Social support shown to be the most powerful protection against becoming overwhelmed by stress and trauma after a disaster.
- However, social support is not the same as being merely in the presence of others.
- The critical issue is...

EMPATHY

- Empathy is the ability to put yourself in somebody else's shoes—both in an emotional sense, to feel a bit what they might feel, but also in a cognitive sense, to see the situation from their perspective.
- If you approach an interaction from an empathic stance, you're much less likely to have a negative stance on whatever is going on.
- You will likely know the person and their story better.
- This in turn lets you be more regulated in the way you interact with the person.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

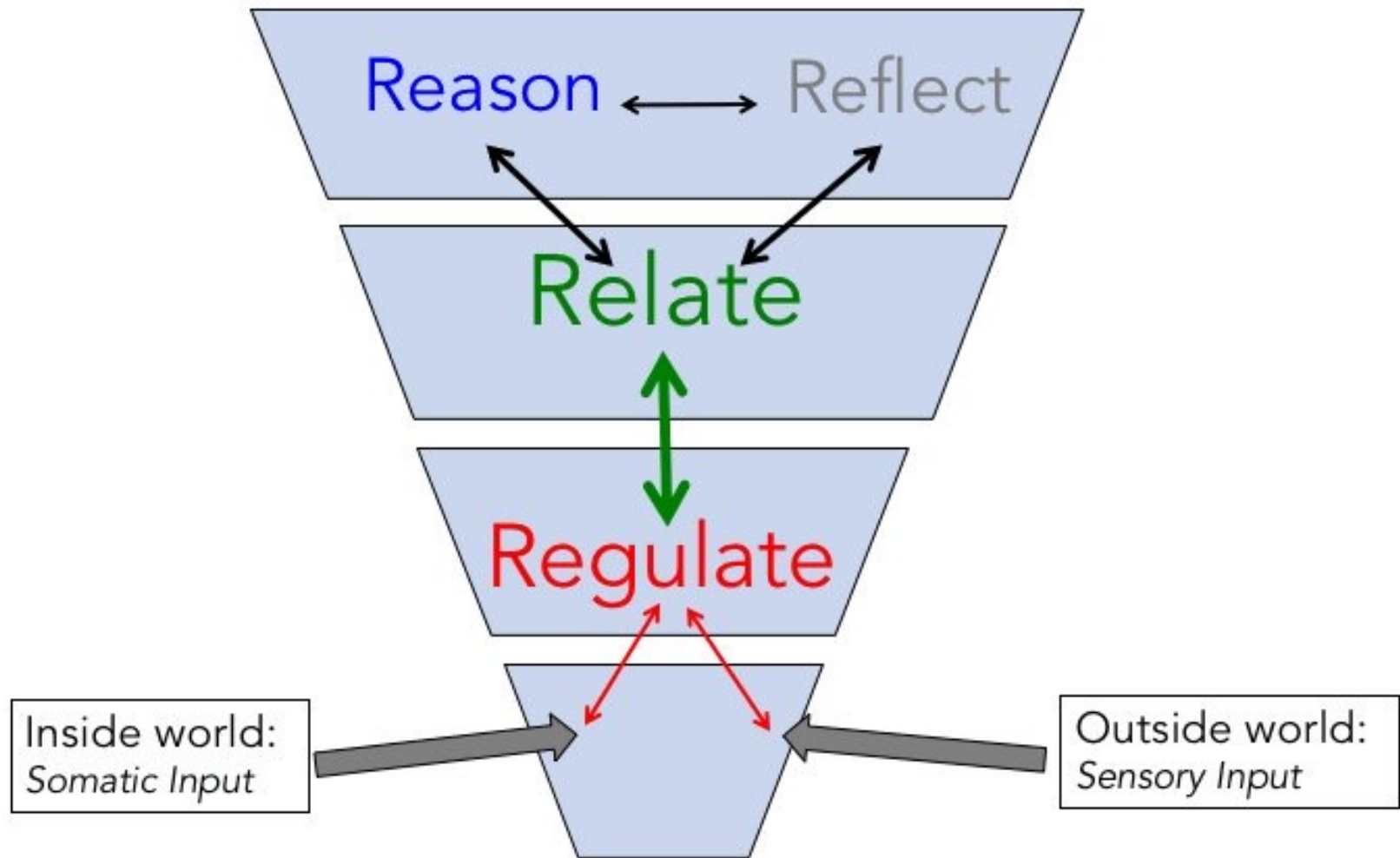
- One of the most important things for our health and wellbeing is connection to others.
- Developmental trauma can disrupt our ability to form and maintain relationships.
- Communication is about getting some idea, concept, or story from one person's cortex to another person's cortex.
- However, all information must pass through lower levels of the brain.
- And if one or both people are dysregulated, their cortex shuts down.



CONNECTING THE DOTS

- Regulation is the key to creating a safe connection.
- And being connected is the most efficient and effective way to get information up to the cortex.
- Bruce Perry's term *sequence of engagement* describes the steps involved in getting to the cortex.

Sequential Engagement & Processing



THE POWER OF REGULATION

- In order to communicate rationally and successfully with anyone, you have to make sure they are *regulated*, make sure they feel a *relationship* with you, and only then try to *reason* with them.
- Remember, you must be regulated yourself.
- Work to reduce any power differential.

REGULATION

- Patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activity makes the overly reactive core regulatory networks get back in balance.
- Music, sport, dance, drawing, and walking in nature regulate. Each of these activities also has very important relational elements. They also have important cognitive elements.
- They engage, activate and synchronise activity throughout the brain from the bottom up and from the top down.

Stress

Unpredictable

Severe

Prolonged

Vulnerability

Predictable

Moderate

Controlled

Resilience

THERAPEUTIC DOSES

- Moderate, controllable, and predictable interactions are therapeutic.
- 'Healing takes place when there are dozens of therapeutic moments available each day for the person to control, revisiting and reworking their trauma.'
- We begin to heal a sensitised system.
- We heal in community.

HELPING OTHERS REGULATE

- When someone is very upset, words themselves are not very effective. The tone and rhythm of the voice probably has more impact than the actual words. A smile is important.
- Simply 'be present'. Let them catch your calm. Encourage and congratulate.
- It helps to use some form of rhythmic regulating activity to keep yourself self-regulated while you're doing this, e.g. taking a walk, shooting some baskets.

HELPING OTHERS REGULATE

- Let them control when and how much they're going to talk about what's upsetting them. If you give a person that control and help them feel safe, in their own time they'll be more capable of talking.
- We want to provide therapeutic, healing interactions. Moderate, controllable and predictable interactions.

WANTING CHAOS

- Order, stability, and nurturing is sometimes a challenge to a traumatised children's worldview.
- Their brain is going, *What the hell is this? I want something familiar.*
- So they start acting out, creating chaos where there is order.
- You have to give these children time and experience. They need patience and understanding, and sufficient new experiences to shape new views of the world.

REWORKING THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

- Our mind works to preserve our early life worldview – people are good, parents protect us, schools are safe
- Trauma shatters our worldview, leaves you shipwrecked – people can't be trusted, my father hurts me, school was where my friends were shot.
- Part of the rebuilding, the healing process, is continually revisiting the shattered hull to build a new worldview.

THE HEALING PROCESS

- When we activate trauma memories in our stress response systems in ways that offer moderation, controllability and predictability, we can begin to heal a sensitised system.
- Healing takes place when there are dozens of therapeutic moments available each day for the person to control, revisiting and reworking their traumatic experience.

THE POWER OF STORY

- Stories assist us to develop empathy by helping us see the world from others' perspectives.
- Stories give cognitive and emotional significance to experience.
- Stories enhance our creativity and help us think beyond the here and now.
- Stories unlock the mysteries of psychological suffering that declarative facts cannot reveal.
- Stories help regulate and shape our brains.

HOLDING SPACE

'When we hold space for someone, we bear witness to them, their stories, their pain. We serve as a supportive audience member, sometimes a coach, sometimes a warm shoulder for comfort. We hold the vision of the person being well, being happy, being recovered. The more people who hold their vision, the more possible recovery becomes....'

HOLDING SPACE

- '...Having a good story to describe the person's travails helps us all to hold hands and look in the same direction. It gives us a sense of coherence, of being on the same page with each other. These are powerful feelings that make us feel that we belong to something greater than our single bodies, thereby creating the expectation that a miracle is about to happen.' **Lewis Mehl-Madrona**

THE HEALING POWER OF COMMUNITY

- The key ingredient to effective healing involves using your healthy relationships. We heal best in community.
- A healing community gives you opportunities to revisit trauma in moderate controllable doses in a safe environment.
- Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love.

WACO (pp. 203)

The Neurosequential Model

Each person has a unique pathway to the present and deserves individualized care.

“One-size fits all” approaches rarely meet the needs of the individual – more often they meet a need of the provider (or system).

A HEALING COMMUNITY

- Healing takes time, but this approach leads to a more regulated stress response system.
- The person can ultimately develop the capacity to demonstrate resilience.
- The journey from *traumatised* to *typical* to *resilient* helps create a unique strength and perspective. That journey can create post-traumatic wisdom.

POST-TRAUMATIC WISDOM

- 'When you have lived through adversity, you come to a point in where you can look back on your life, reflect, learn, and grow from the experience. I believe it is hard to understand humankind unless you know a little bit about adversity. Adversity, challenges, disappointments, loss, trauma – all can contribute to the capacity to be broadly empathic, to become wise. Trauma and adversity, in a way, are gifts. What we do with these gifts will differ from person to person.'

Dr Bruce D Perry

CARROLUP HEALING COMMUNITY

- Noel White's empathy and compassion.
- Regulating activities: music, dance, art, needlework, drama, mime, story-telling, walking in the bush, sport.
- He created connection, a community where everyone helped each other.
- He encouraged children to talk with the Aboriginal people over the river to learn about their culture and history.

CARROLUP HEALING COMMUNITY

- Felt safe (had gained a sense of belonging).
- Connected to culture, country and others.
- Had hope.
- Felt empowered.
- Had a sense of competence & achievement. Felt pride.
- Had trust and were trusted.
- Had meaning and purpose.
- Possessed a strong identity.
- Were loved and loved.
- Reciprocity: being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else's mind and heart.

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS TODAY

- Increased relational poverty: lack of connectedness (more isolation). We trust less people.
- Shift towards extrinsic goals (materialism, status) & away from intrinsic goals (community, meaning of life).
- Sensory overload from proliferation of screen-based technologies.
- Increases in anxiety, depression and suicide.

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS TODAY

- Increased use of alcohol, prescription drugs and illicit drugs as a coping mechanism, which can lead to further problems.
- Young people becoming less empathic, also increased psychopathy.
- Less tolerance of 'others' resulting in more shaming, marginalising & trauma in society (and more barriers to healing).
- Government & services' shortcomings resulting in disempowerment of individuals & communities.

TODAY'S WORLD

- 'I believe we don't have enough quiet conversational moments listening to a friend with no other distractions. That kind of interaction is a completely different level of human connection.'
 - 'Our culture is so "advanced", and we have such wealth, creativity, and productivity—yet the disparities and inequities in all of our systems continue to marginalize, fragment, and undermine community and cultural cohesion.'
 - 'The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.'
- Isaac Asimov**
- '... we're still not meeting the fundamental relational needs of our children or ourselves. So many people feel empty and are seeking connection, and often seeking it in really unhealthy ways.'

THE PAST INFLUENCES THE PRESENT

'Our ancestors recognise the importance of connectedness and the toxicity of exclusion. The history of the "civilised" world on the other hand is filled with policies and practises that favoured disconnection and marginalisation - that destroyed family, community and culture. Colonisation, slavery, the U.S. reservation system, Canada's residential schools, Australia's Stolen Generation - these were so destructive across so many generations because they intentionally destroyed the family and cultural bonds that keep people connected.'

THE PAST INFLUENCES THE PRESENT

'They created disconnected, traumatised individuals in inescapable, painful situations - situations that, as we've discussed, make people dissociate in order to adapt and survive. And even though the dissociation is adaptive, it results in more passivity and compliance, making traumatised peoples easier to dehumanise and exploit.'

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS TODAY

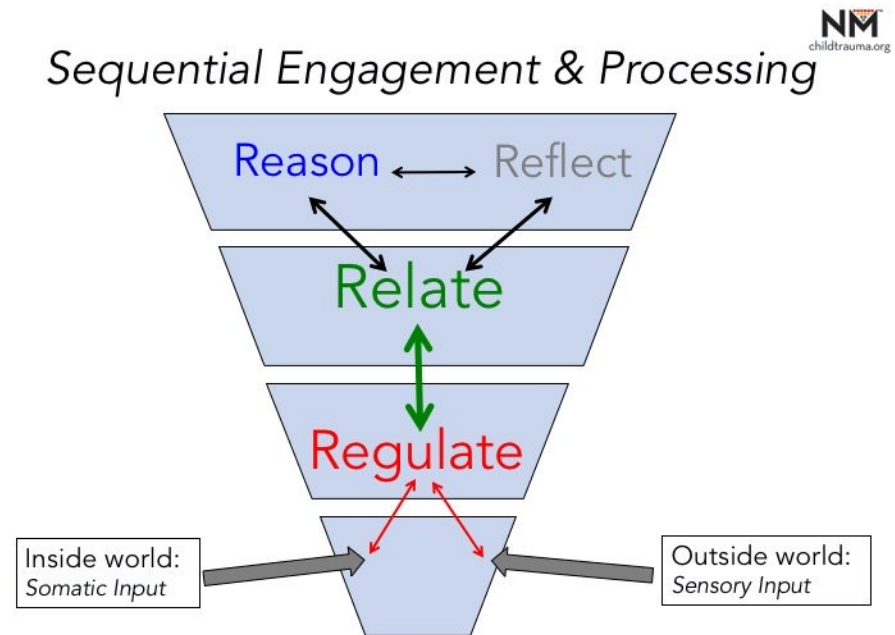
'While less obvious to some, I believe that our existing child-welfare, educational, mental health, and juvenile-justice systems often do the same thing. They fragment families, undermine community, and engage in marginalising, shaming, and punitive practises.'

HEALING IS POSSIBLE

'I can't tell you how many people feel incredibly relieved when they get an explanation of how their brain is working, and why. We don't give them a psychiatric label. We're just saying this is the way you're organized and it's absolutely predictable based upon *what happened to you*. Then we help them understand that the brain is malleable, "plastic", changeable. And together we come up with a plan that will help some of the systems that appear to be causing them problems. ' *Bruce Perry*

HEALING IS POSSIBLE

- Address the brain's problems in the proper sequence and focusing on the lower networks before moving on to issues in higher regions.
- Regulate, Relate, and then Reason.
- Adults need to be better regulated – for our children! Self-care.



- 'How can our society move toward a more humane, socially just, creative, and productive future without confronting our collective historical trauma? Both trauma experienced and trauma inflicted. If we want to truly understand ourselves, we need to understand our history—our true history. Because the emotional residue of our past follows us.' **Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.**

OUR ANCESTORS

- 'Our species could not have survived if a majority of our traumatized ancestors lost their capacity to function well. The pillars of traditional healing were 1) connection to clan and the natural world; 2) regulating rhythm through dance, drumming, and song; 3) a set of beliefs, values, and stories that brought meaning to even senseless, random trauma...'
- 'The medical model... greatly undervalues the power of connectedness and rhythm.'

Bruce Perry

INDIGENOUS HEALING PRACTICES

- '... do a remarkable job of creating a total mind-body experience influences multiple brain systems.
- ... are repetitive, rhythmic, relevant, relational, respectful and rewarding - experiences known to be effective in altering neural systems involved in the stress response. These practices emerged because they worked. People felt better and functioned better, and the core elements of the healing process were reinforced and passed on. Cultures separated by time and space converged on the same principles for healing.' **Bruce Perry**

INDIGENOUS HEALING

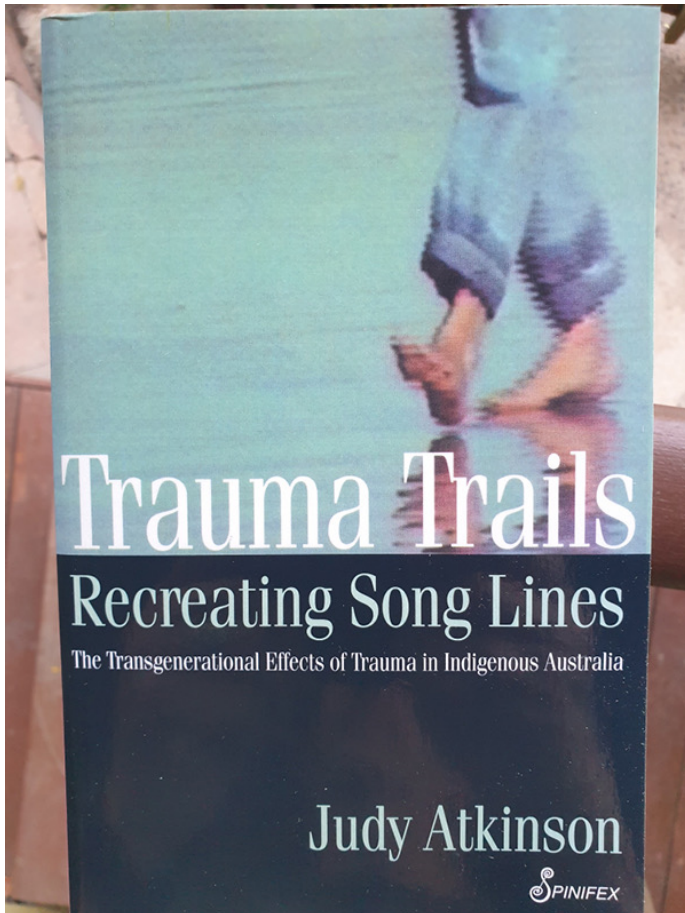
- Māori Elders believe that trauma, anxiety, depression, and addiction are “all the same thing”—and are all related to our connectedness, our sense of belonging.
- Colonisation has intentionally fragmented families, community cohesion, and cultures – disconnection is at the heart of trauma and its consequences.
- A core element of all traditional healing is what the Māoris call whanaungatanga. The word refers to reciprocal relationships, kinship, and a sense of family connection. From shared experiences and challenges, a sense of connectedness and belonging emerges.
- Many healing practices and rituals involve “reconnection”, which involves sharing experiences.

INDIGENOUS WISDOM

'In relation to Indigenous elders, their understanding of the primacy of human connectedness reflects the wisdom lost in our current world. How ironic that the cultures our modern world has marginalised are the very cultures with the wisdom to heal our modern woes.'

Bruce Perry

'TRAUMA TRAILS' & WE AL-LI



WHAT IS HEALING?

'Healing can be described as a journey of self-discovery as people engage together in educating themselves about themselves.... healing involves the processes of awakening to the pain of unmet needs and working towards having those needs met in reciprocal relationships with others.'

Judy Atkinson

SIX STEPS IN HEALING TRAUMA

1. Create culturally safe places.
2. Finding and telling our stories.
3. Making sense of our stories.
4. Feeling the feelings.
5. Moving through layers of loss and grief... ownership... choices.
6. Strengthening cultural and spiritual identities.

CULTURAL TOOLS FOR HEALING

- Culture / Ceremony / Circle (Group Work)
- Connection to Country / Nature
- Food
- Storytelling
- Art
- Music / Dance / Singing / Sound / Breath
- Theatre / Drama
- Body Work (Yoga / Massage / Mindfulness)



