



# *The Acadami*

*Ignite. Elevate. Empower.*

[www.TheAcadami.com](http://www.TheAcadami.com)

Ami Davis

@ami\_r\_davis

ami@theacadami.com

@TheAcadami





# Working with CSEC folks: Social Workers

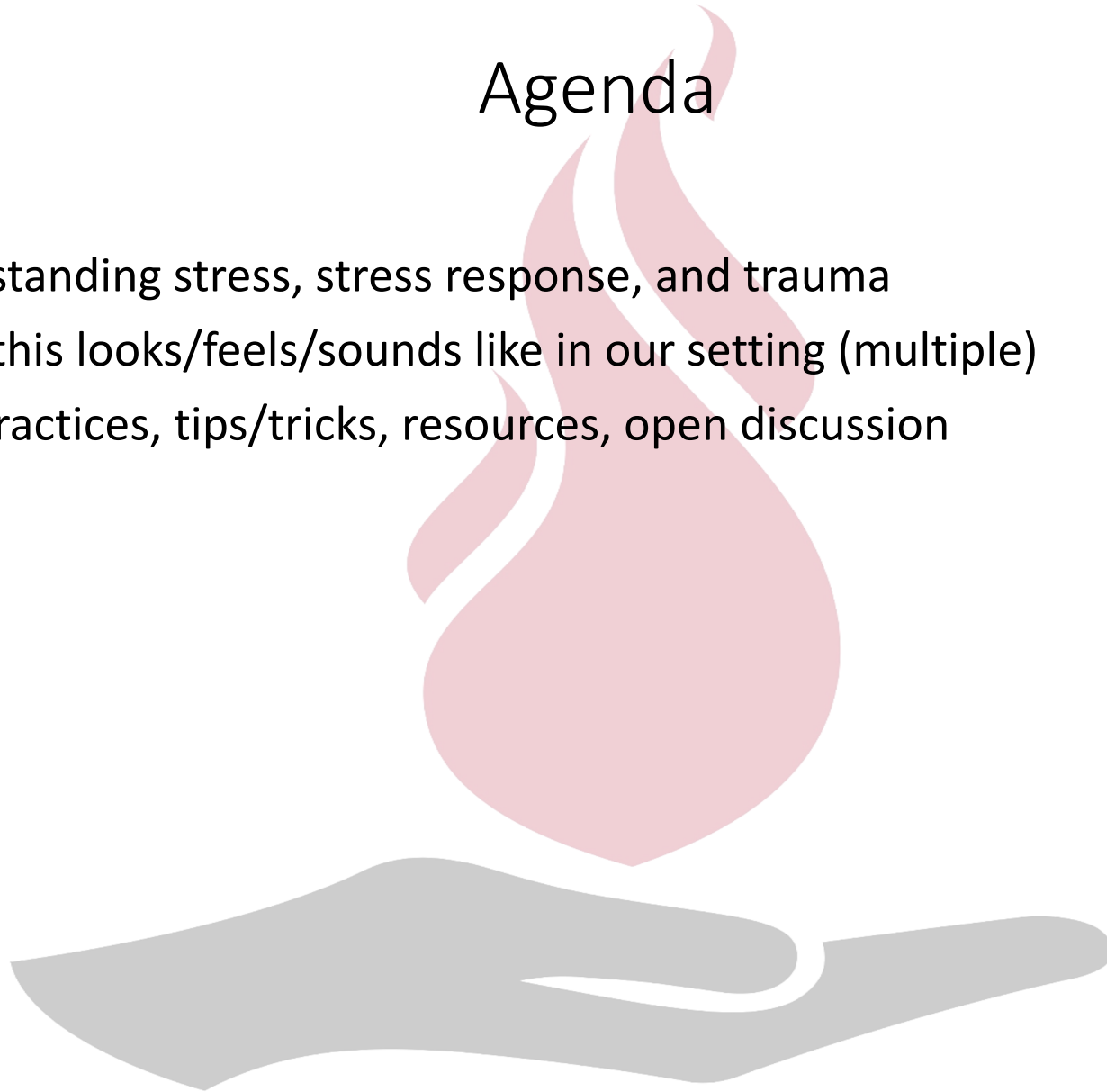
Ami Davis

She/her/hers

CEO/Founder: The Acadami

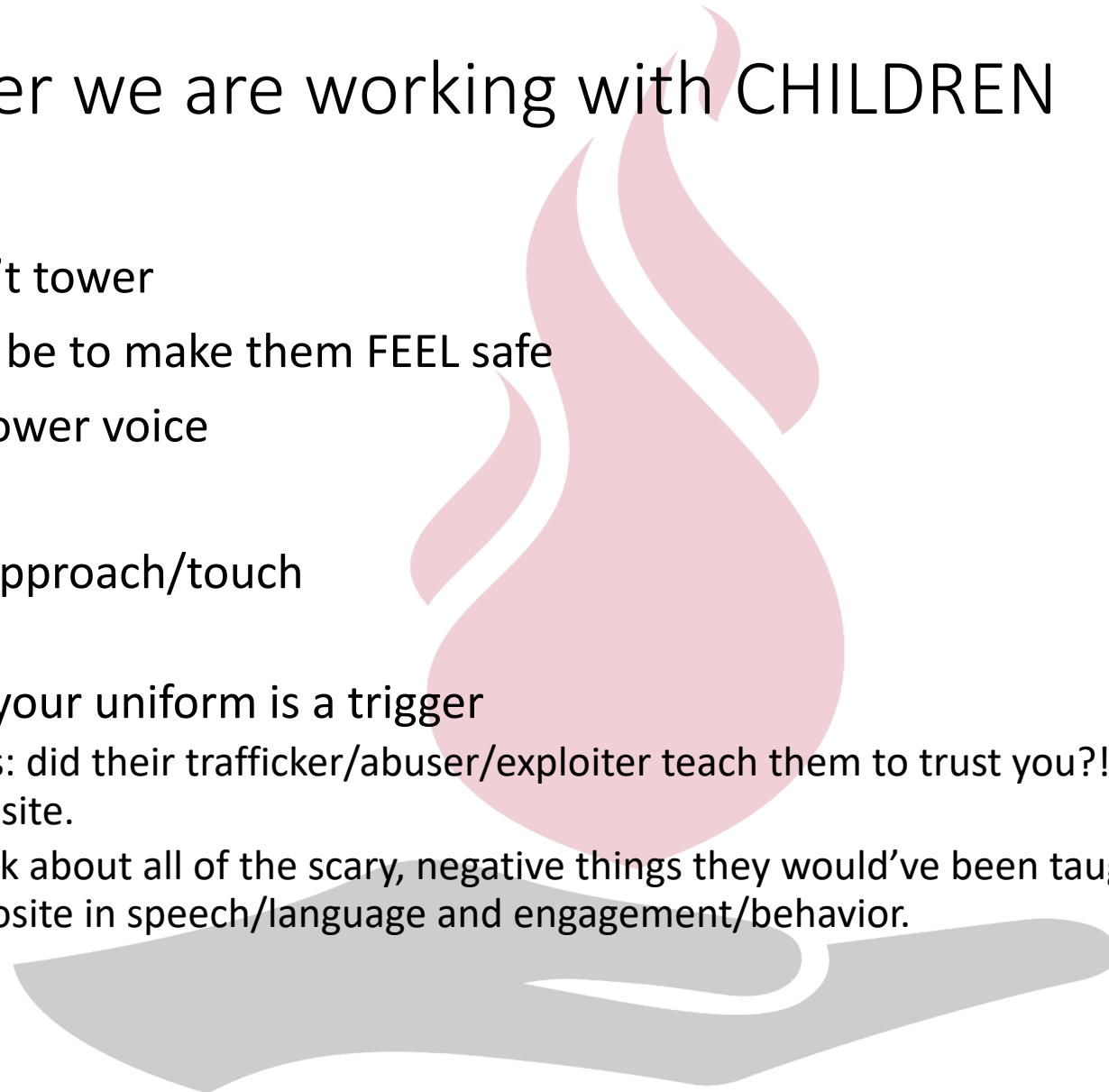
# Agenda

- Section 1: understanding stress, stress response, and trauma
- Section 2: What this looks/feels/sounds like in our setting (multiple)
- Section 3: Best practices, tips/tricks, resources, open discussion



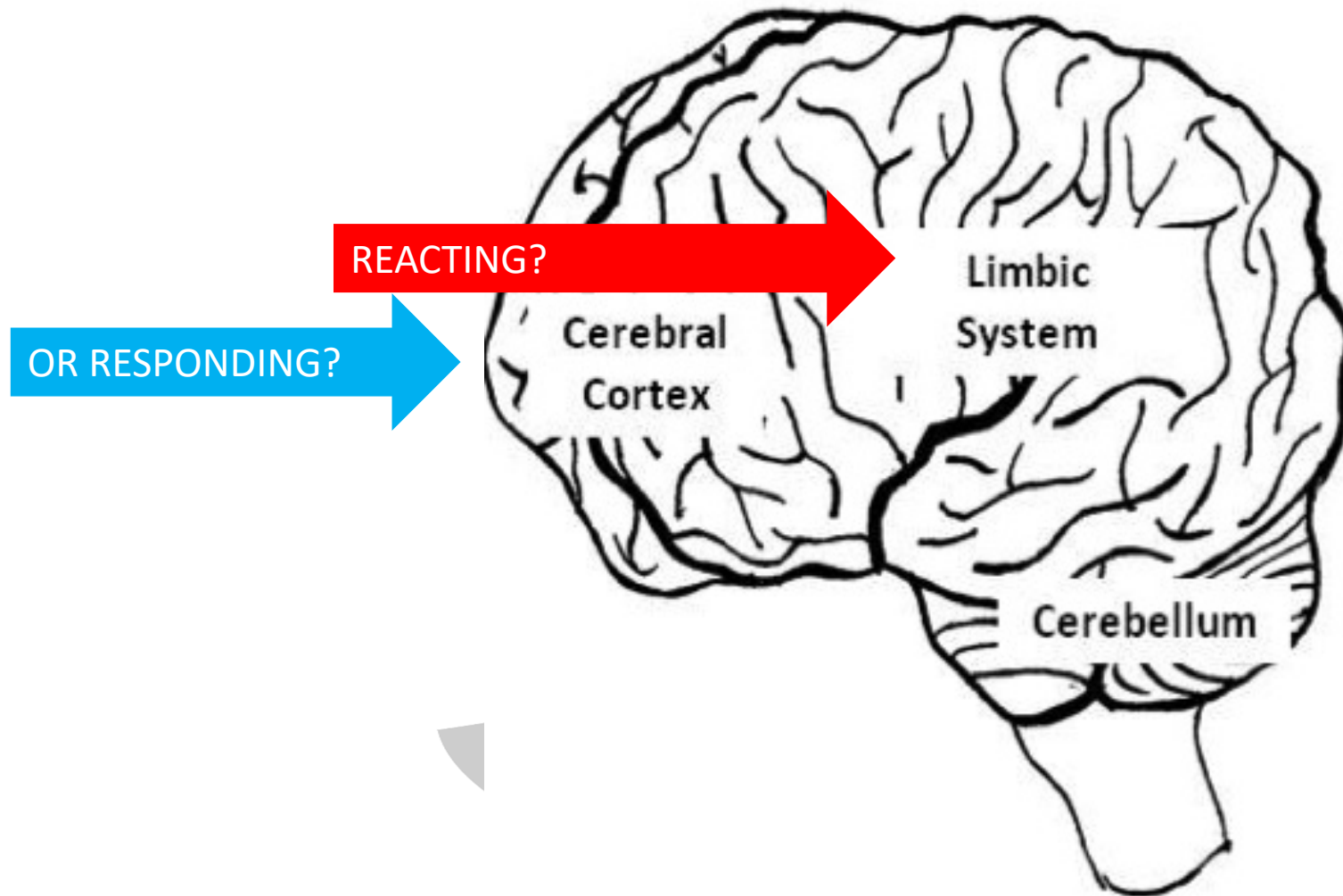
# 1. Remember we are working with CHILDREN

- Bend down, don't tower
- Your goal should be to make them FEEL safe
- Use soft tones, lower voice
- SMILE
- ALWAYS ASK to approach/touch
  - Give SPACE
- Remember that your uniform is a trigger
  - Think about this: did their trafficker/abuser/exploiter teach them to trust you?! To respond well to you?! NOPE, the opposite.
  - We have to think about all of the scary, negative things they would've been taught/told about the police and BE the opposite in speech/language and engagement/behavior.





# The “3-Brain” Brain Complex



**Cerebellum** – the “motor control” part of our brains: *breathing, heartbeat and motor skills*

**Limbic System** – the “reactionary” part of our brains: *emotions, fight-or-flight, pleasure/reward and pain*

**Cerebral Cortex** – the “thinking” part of our brains: *reasoning, judgment, motivation, perception, memory and learning*





## **Positive**

Brief increases in heart rate,  
mild elevations in stress hormone levels



## **Tolerable**

Serious, temporary stress responses,  
buffered by supportive relationships



## **Toxic**

Prolonged activation of stress response systems  
in the absence of protective relationships

# Mirror Neurons



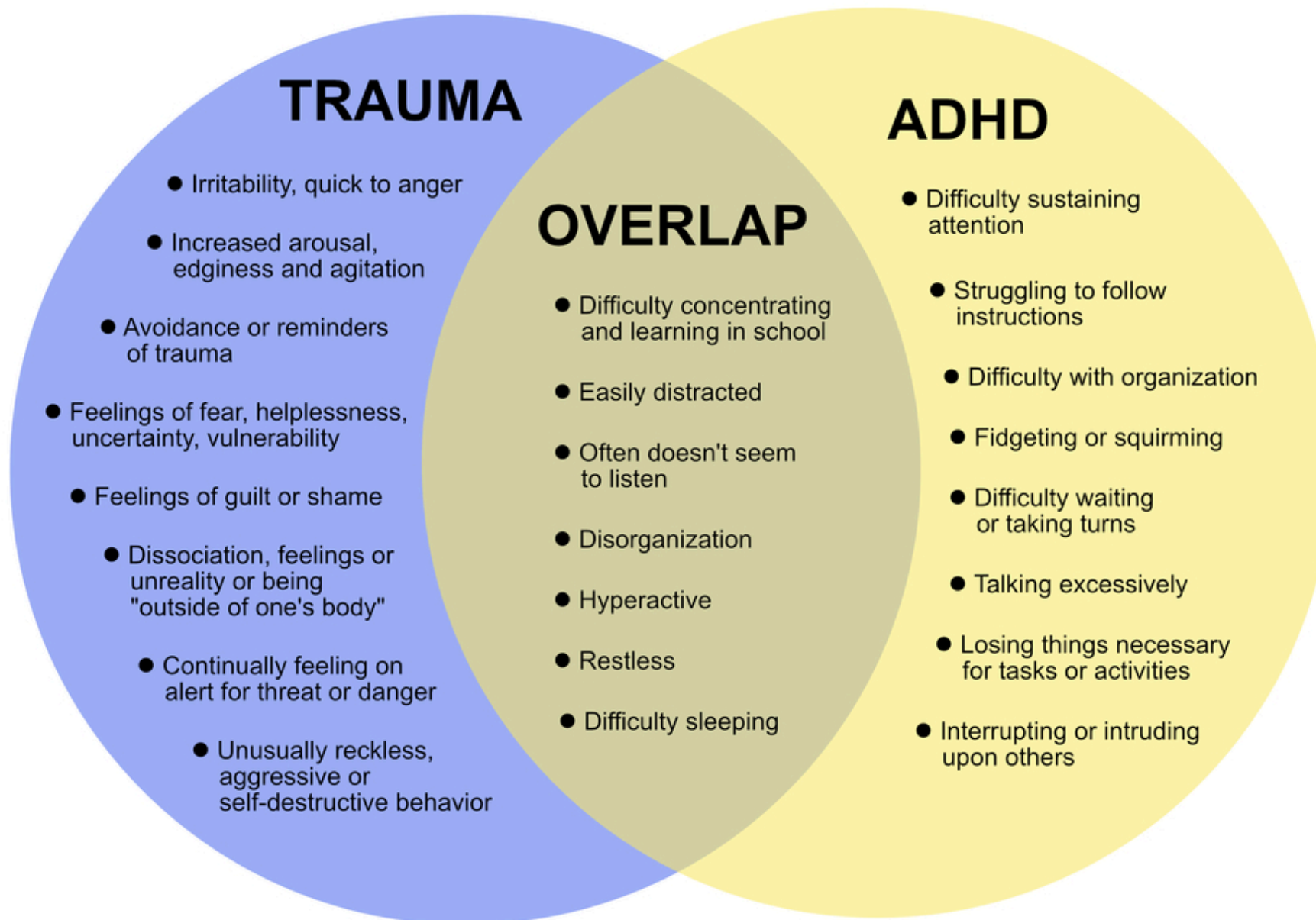


# Hyper Arousal V Dissociation





OBC

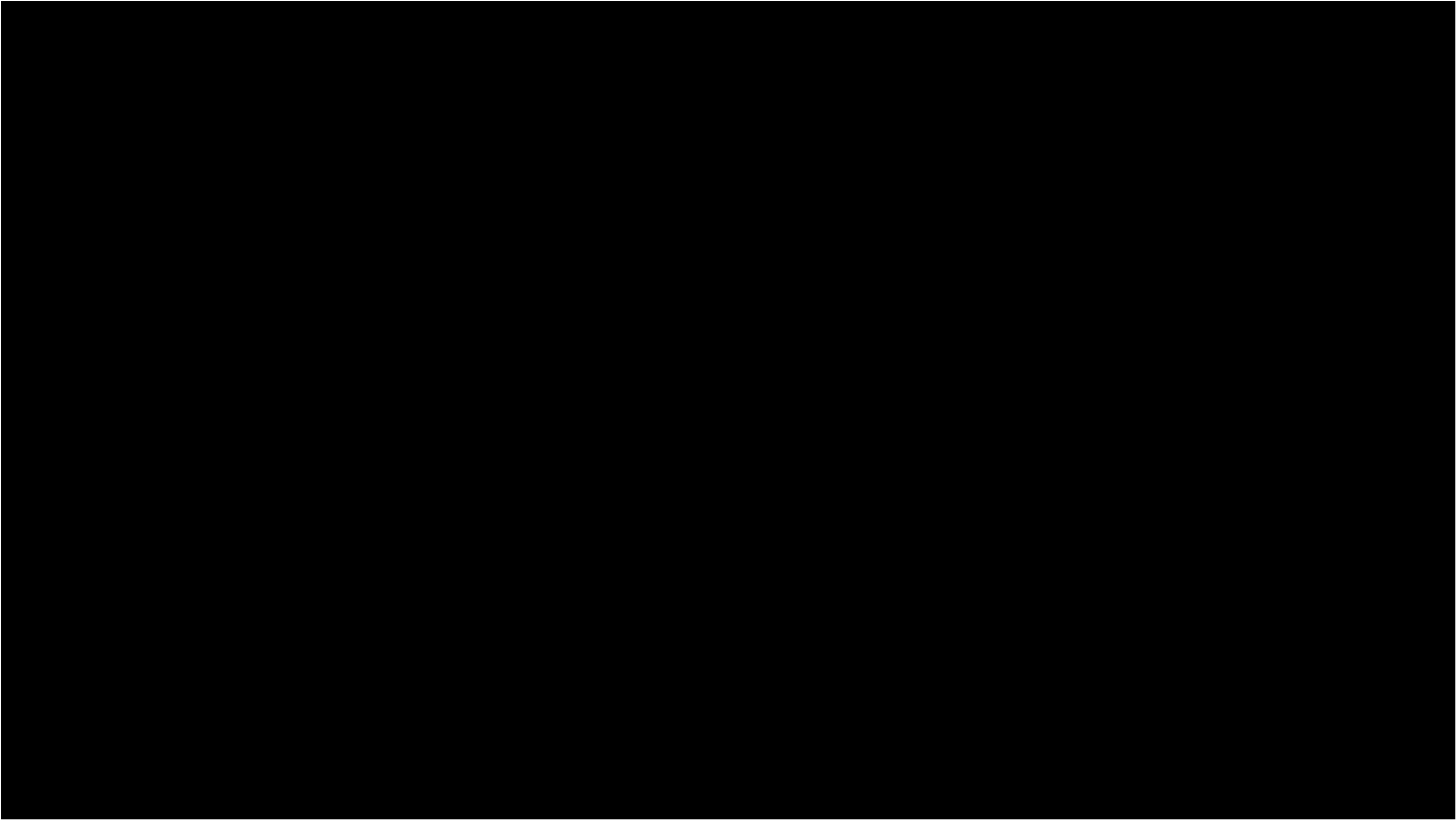


# Hyper-Arousal Behaviors



- Uncontrollable and sudden outbursts
- Anger/aggression
- Violence
- Yelling
- Can't sleep
- Disrespectful language
- Ready to fight, tensed body, crossed arms





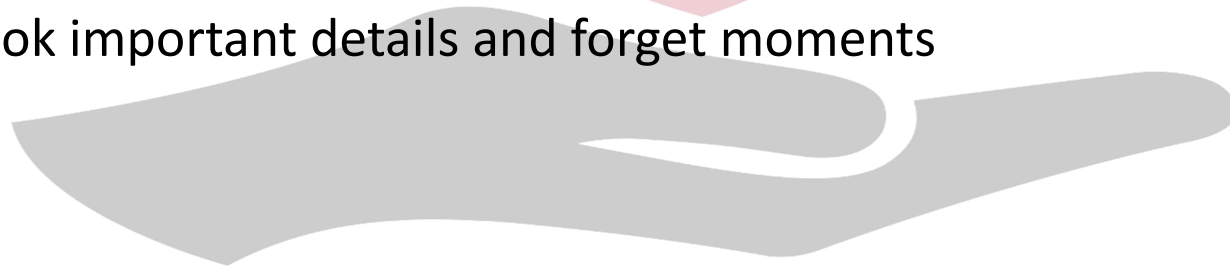
# Dissociative Behaviors

- Withdrawn
- Shy
- “Spacing out”
- Over compliance
- often feel ‘spacey’, ‘floaty’, or like your brain is ‘foggy’
- might even get sleepy whenever life gets challenging
- people say you are really calm under stress, but the truth is you are just numb
- the more stressful a situation, the less you can think clearly
- you can have a sense you are watching your life instead of in it, as if life is a movie you are watching
- when people ask how you are feeling you find it difficult to know
- others often get frustrated as they think you aren’t listening
- you have delayed reactions – what you really wanted to say or do in a situation a day or several days later but very rarely in the moment
- you might sometimes even feel disconnected from your body, as if you aren’t quite in it
- you can easily overlook important details and forget moments



# What does dissociation look like? Signs to watch for

- you often feel 'spacey', 'floaty', or like your brain is 'foggy'
- you might even get sleepy whenever life gets challenging
- people say you are really calm under stress, but the truth is you are just numb
- the more stressful a situation, the less you can think clearly
- you can have a sense you are watching your life instead of in it, as if life is a movie you are watching
- when people ask how you are feeling you find it difficult to know
- others often get frustrated as they think you aren't listening
- you have delayed reactions – what you really wanted to say or do in a situation a day or several days later but very rarely in the moment
- you might sometimes even feel disconnected from your body, as if you aren't quite in it
- you can easily overlook important details and forget moments



# Some Common Triggers

!! EVERYONE HAS DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES AND THUS DIFFERENT TRIGGERS !!

- Loud sounds
- Voices: deep, loud, sometimes gendered
- Light – bright/darkness/flashing
- Physical size of adults

THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE HERE IS THAT WHEN YOU DO “HIT A NERVE” OR TRIGGER SOMEONE, ESPECIALLY A CHILD, DO NOT REACT YOURSELF. STAY CALM, COLLECTED, AND UNDERSTANDING. THEY NEED EMPATHY AND COMFORT, NOT YOUR IMPATIENCE.



# Self-Regulating Behaviors

- Movement/rocking
- Biting/chewing
- Tapping, bouncing of the leg/body
- Not being able to sit/pacing
- Draw to music
- “Hiding” in clothes or with their body or someone else’s
- Not talking or talking excessively
- Crying

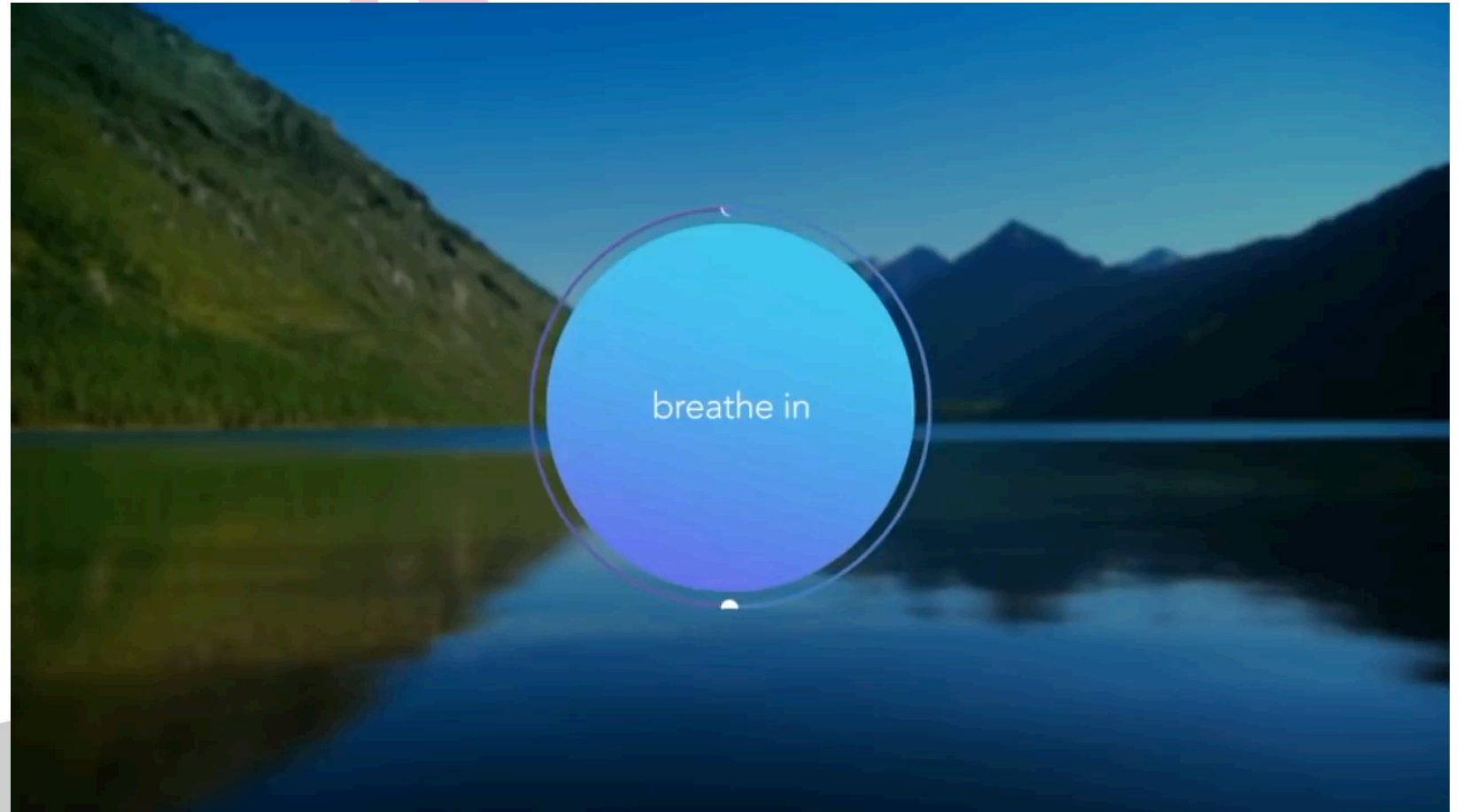


# Open Discussion



# Let's leave the stress at the door....

1. Sit comfortably, OPEN hands, open front body
2. Scan your body for tension
3. As you follow the breath cues, INTENTIONALLY release that muscle tension, anywhere you find it



# “What do I do?”

## Trauma-Informed Support for Children

1

### Create safety

If the child is overwhelmed, perhaps guide them to a quiet corner or allow them to decompress by visiting the restroom. If you are in a classroom, maybe you have a peace corner that you've outfitted with blankets or a screen so that it feels like a safe place.

2

### Regulate the nervous system

Stress brings a predictable pattern of physiological responses and anyone who has suffered toxic stress or trauma is going to be quickly stressed into hyperarousal (explosive, jittery, irritable) or hypoarousal (depressed, withdrawn, zombie-like). No matter how ingenious our regulation strategies, how artsy-crafty we get with tools, the child has to find what works for them.

3

### Build a connected relationship

This is the number one way to regulate the nervous system. When we are around people we care about, our bodies produce oxytocin, which is the hormone responsible for calming our nervous system after stress. If we stay connected, then eventually the calm discussion of each person's feelings and needs can take place.

4

### Support development of coherent narrative

Creating predictability through structure, routines and the presence of reliable adults helps reduce the chaos a child may feel and allows them to start creating the kind of logical sequential connections that not only help them understand their own narrative, but are also the fundamental requirement of many types of learning.

5

### Practice 'power-with' strategies

One of the hallmarks of trauma is a loss of power and control. When someone is wielding power over you with no regard to your thoughts or feelings, the toxic shame of the original trauma may come flooding back. As adults, we should use our power well. If we model a 'power-with' relationship with children it's our best chance of creating adults who will treat others with dignity and respect.

6

### Build social emotional and resiliency skills

Trauma robs us of time spent developing social and emotional skills. The brain is too occupied with survival to devote much of its energy to learning how to build relationships and it's a good chance we didn't see those skills modeled for us. Learning to care for one another is the most important job we have growing up.

7

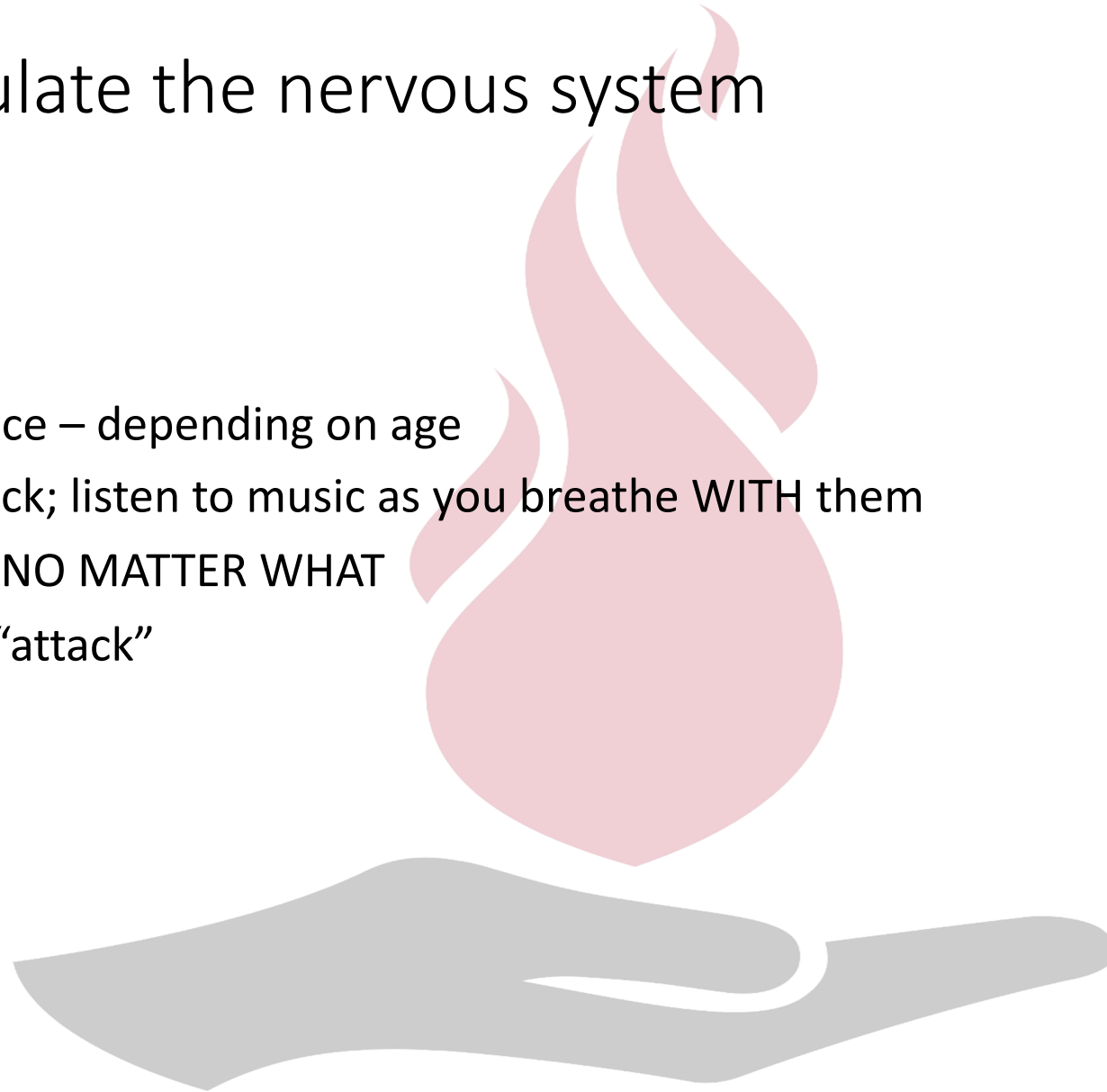
### Foster post-traumatic growth

We know that there are qualities and skills that allow people to overcome the most devastating trauma and not just survive but find new purpose and meaning in their lives. Problem solving, planning, maintaining focus despite discomfort, self-control and seeking support are all known to lead to post-traumatic growth and are skills we can foster in children.



# How to regulate the nervous system

- “Wet noodle”
- Deep breathing
- Create a safe space – depending on age
- Allow them to rock; listen to music as you breathe WITH them
- Model calmness NO MATTER WHAT
- Do not argue or “attack”



# Teaching Self-Regulation

- Wet noodle
- Breathing exercises
- Communicating emotions

## Lemon Squeezies

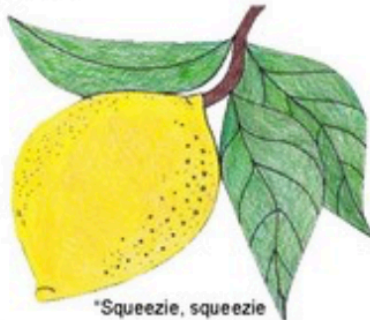
Squeeze your hands, arms and legs tight

Pretend you are squeezing juice out of a lemon

Now shake your whole body and shake off all the juice

Try it again!

Try standing straight and stiff, and now flopping like a sock monkey



"Squeezie, squeezie  
lemon squeezie  
shake it off  
nice and easy!"



## Sigh Breathing

Breathe in like smelling flowers

Breathe out with a sigh

Try it again five times

You can also...

Make the biggest sigh in the world

Make the smallest and quietest sigh

Try it with other lovely smells like chocolate cake!



## Take 5 Breathing

Hold out your hand like a star

Pretend your pointer finger (other hand) is a special pencil

Trace up and down your fingers

Breathe in as you go up

Breathe out as you go down

Go slowly and notice how it feels



## Volcano Breathing

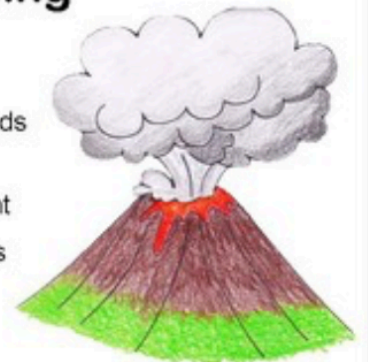
Put your hands together





Breathe in and push your hands up above your head

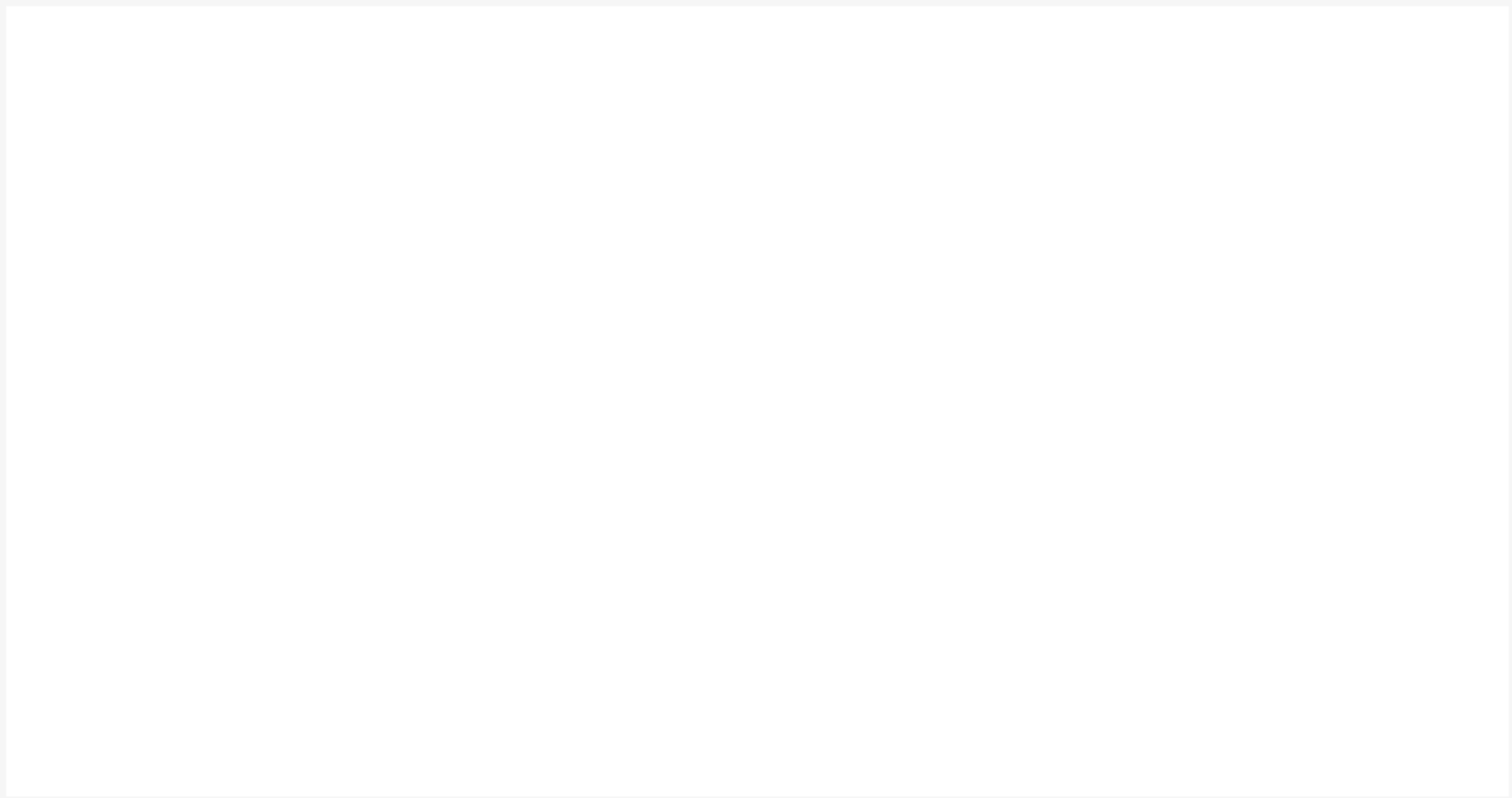
Hold your breath for a moment

Breathe out as you bring arms down your sides like an exploding volcano

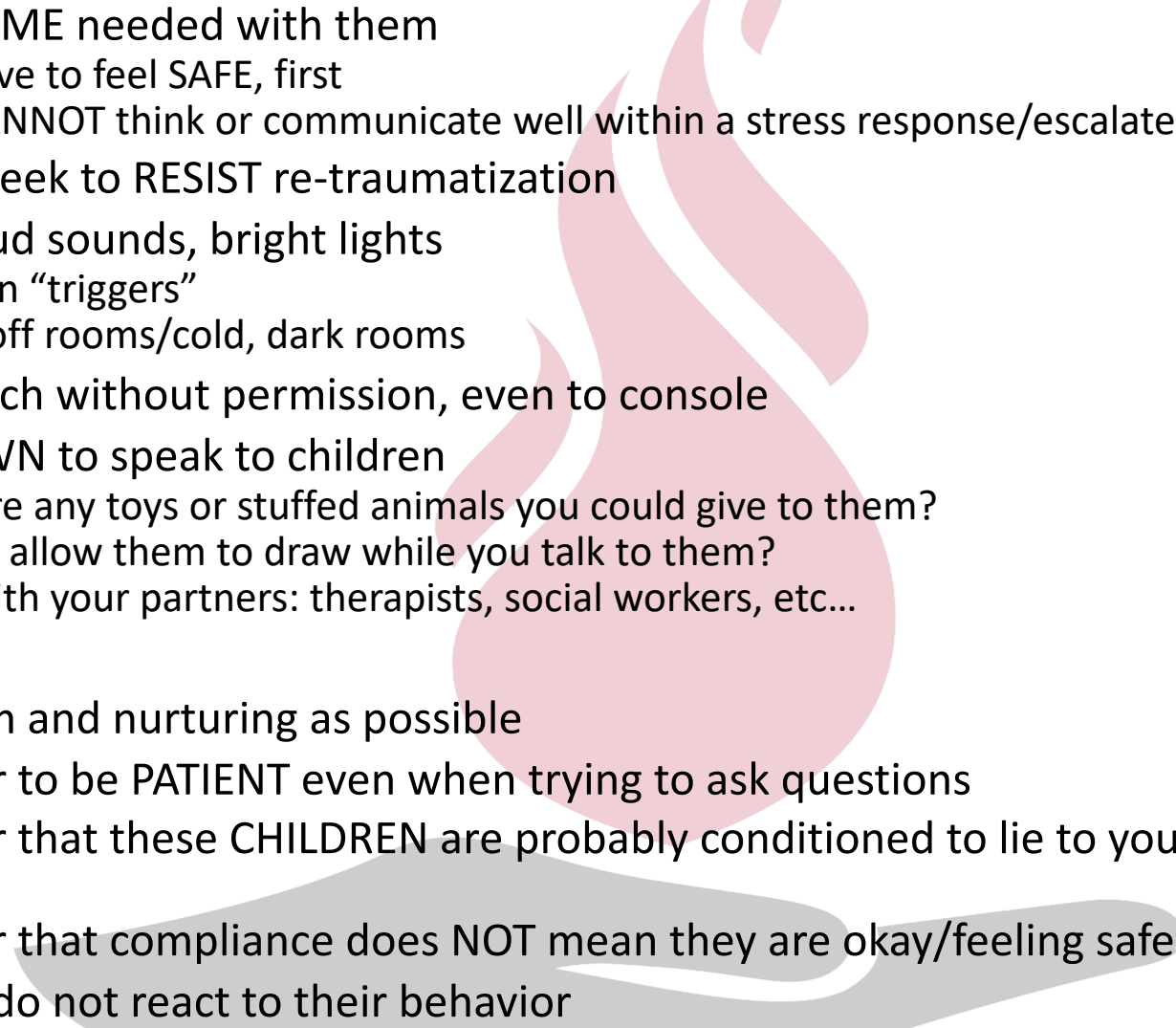
Try it three times



Emotional Level	I feel this way when...
 feeling good	
 a little upset	Should be here: I can't wear my favorite shirt.
 upset	I can't figure out an answer on my homework.
 very upset	I can't wear my favorite shirt.



## Remember your Trauma Responsive Care:

1. Take the TIME needed with them
    1. They have to feel SAFE, first
    2. They CANNOT think or communicate well within a stress response/escalated
  2. ACTIVELY seek to RESIST re-traumatization
  3. Beware loud sounds, bright lights
    1. Common “triggers”
    2. Closed off rooms/cold, dark rooms
  4. NEVER touch without permission, even to console
  5. BEND DOWN to speak to children
    1. Are there any toys or stuffed animals you could give to them?
    2. Can you allow them to draw while you talk to them?
    3. Work with your partners: therapists, social workers, etc...
  6. SMILE
  7. Be as warm and nurturing as possible
  8. Remember to be PATIENT even when trying to ask questions
  9. Remember that these CHILDREN are probably conditioned to lie to you and distrust you, this is NOT their fault
  10. Remember that compliance does NOT mean they are okay/feeling safe
  11. RESPOND do not react to their behavior
  12. Avoiding using language like “good girl” or “good boy”
  13. ASK, “how can I help you feel safer right now?” “is this or that okay with you?”
- 



Any  
1.1  
Questions



# *The Acadami*

*Ignite. Elevate. Empower.*

[www.TheAcadami.com](http://www.TheAcadami.com)

Ami Davis

@ami\_r\_davis

ami@theacadami.com

@TheAcadami

