

# Working with Children with Mental Health and Related Needs

Training for the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department – Machesney Park

The Menta Group

2019-2020

---

# Who We Are

- The Menta Group
  - 45 year history
  - “We don’t give up”
  - Focus is on keeping students in school
- Menta Academy Northwest
  - Opened in response to needs in the community
  - Initially approached by South Beloit School District

# Who We Serve

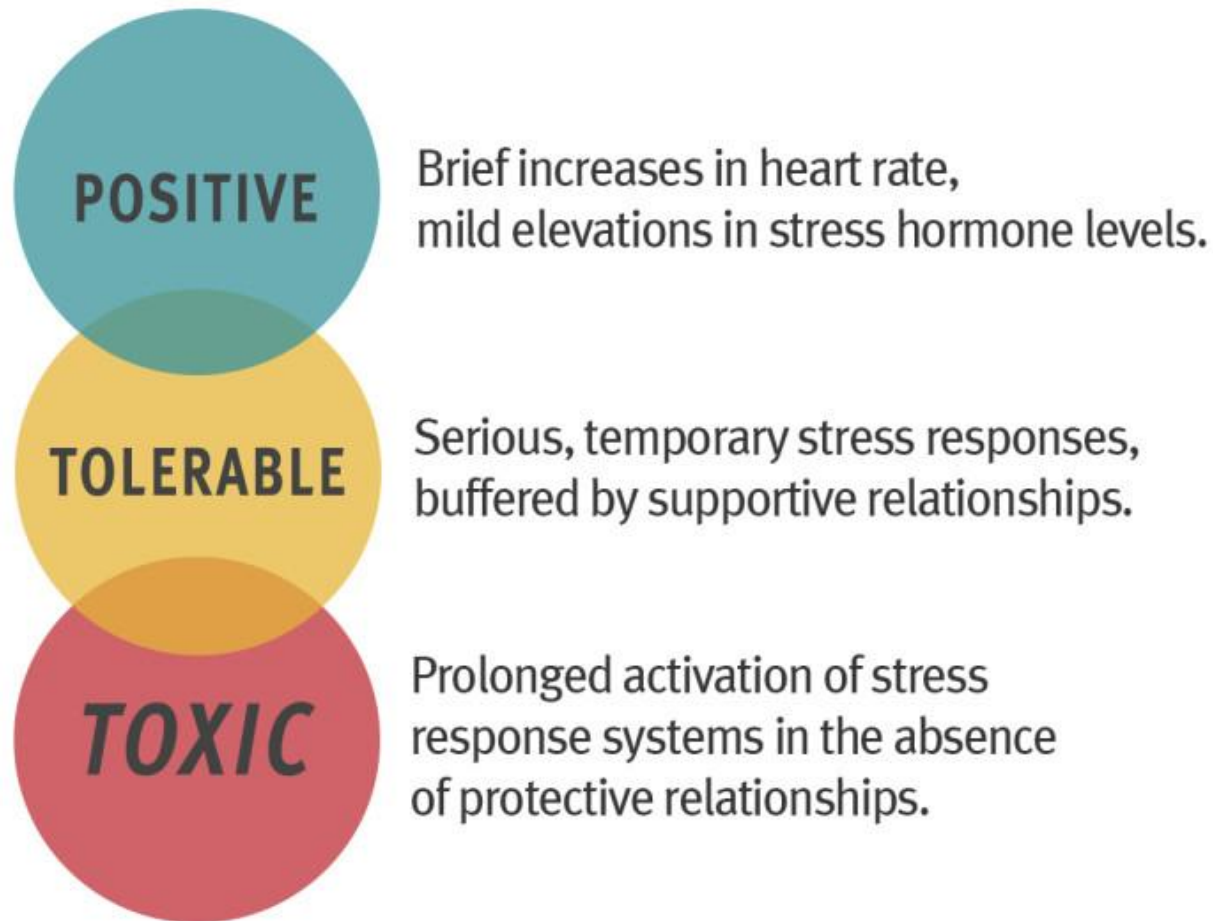
- Special education students
- Ages 5-21
- Referred by their home school district due to specialized needs that can't be met by district programming
- Variety of disabilities
  - Mental health disorders
  - Autism
  - Low cognitive abilities



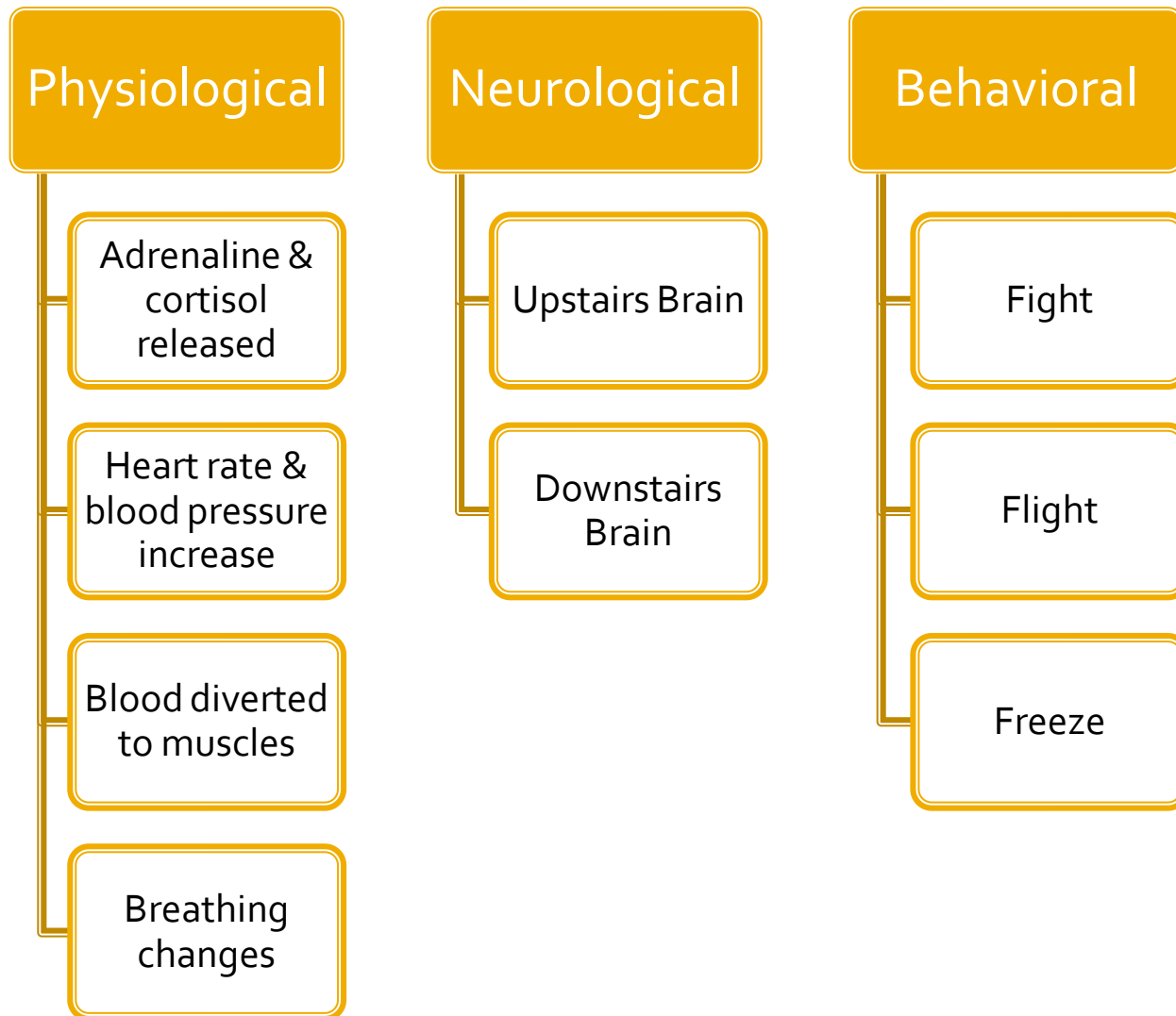
What we see

What we don't  
see

# Normal Stress vs. Toxic Stress



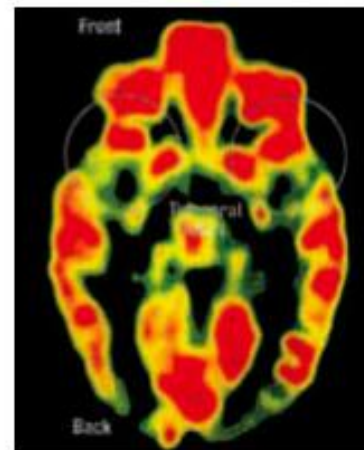
# Body's Stress Response System



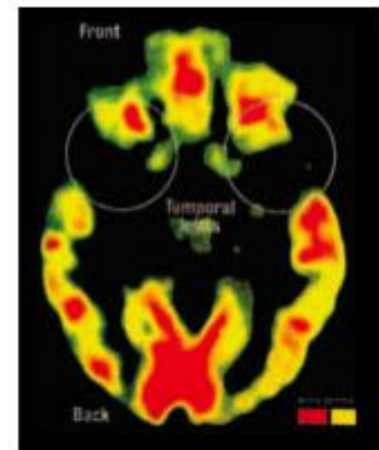
# Brain Development

- Over time, toxic stress changes the brain
- Increased sensitivity to perceived stressors
- Dysregulation is more intense and lasts longer

## Comparison of the Developing Brain



Healthy Development



Development Affected by Environmental Stress

Source: Dr. H. T. Chugani. Newsweek. Spring/Summer 1997 Special Edition: "Your Child: From Birth to Three," pp 30-31.

# Impact

- Difficulty with emotional and behavioral regulation
- Learning and executive functioning problems
- Respond to world as constant danger
- Distrustful of adults
- Unable to develop healthy peer relationships
- High risk behaviors (drinking, drug use, overeating, violence and conduct problems)



# Autism



Characteristics  
of autism

Frustration,  
anxiety, skill  
deficits

Behavioral  
challenges

# Characteristics

## SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Difficulties with:

- Perspective-taking
- Predicting response of others
- Explaining own behavior or understanding impact of their behavior on others
- Interpreting body language and nonverbals
- Staying on topic & engaging in social conversations

## SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

- May be nonverbal or have limited verbal language skills

Difficulties with:

- Following directions
- Interpreting social language like joking and sarcasm

# Characteristics

## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Difficulties with:

- Sustaining attention
- Organizing, planning, reasoning, problem-solving

Rigid, inflexible thinking

Negative reaction to change  
in routines or schedule

## SENSORY PROCESSING

Over or under sensitivity to  
sensory input:

- Loud noises or voices
- Touch

# Autism Simulation Videos

Walking Down the Street:

<https://youtu.be/plPNhooUUuc>

Carly's Café:

<https://youtu.be/KmDGvquzn2k>

# Dr. Nadine Burke Harris - TEDTalk

[https://youtu.be/95ovlJ3dsNk?t=4m2](https://youtu.be/95ovlJ3dsNk?t=4m23s)

[3s](#)

Watch: 4:23 to 9:49

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/activities-understand-autism>