

Understanding the Developmental Effects of Trauma

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MYTHS

- All it takes is love.
- Time heals all wounds.
- Little children don't remember what happens, so we can move them with impunity.
- Our traditional therapeutic “toolboxes” are sufficient.

Complex Trauma (NCTSN)

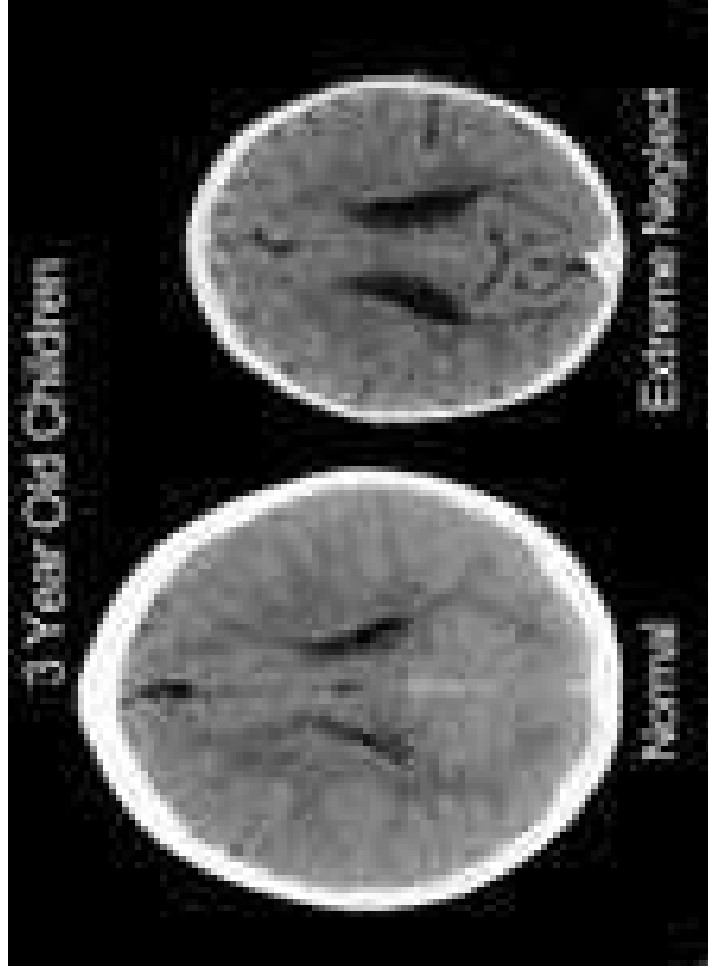
- Exposure to multiple traumatic events that occur within the caregiving relationship – the system that is supposed to be the source of safety and stability in a child's life.
- Maltreatment → emotional dysregulation → loss of secure base → loss of direction → inability to detect or respond to danger → revictimization

Relational Trauma: A Complex Trauma Perspective

Trauma of the maltreatment itself.

- + Loss of the parent as a source of security and comfort.
- + Overwhelming internal distress with no assistance in regulating.

Impact of Neglect



NCTSN Data

9,336 children and youth served nationally:

- 70% multiple forms of trauma
- 48% significant behavioral problems
- 41% significant academic problems
- 31% significant attachment
- 11% suicidality

Pynoos, et al, 2008

Diagnostic Problems

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
 - CANS Study 7668 abused children in foster care: 63% had trauma symptoms, but nearly 95% did not meet criteria for PTSD
- **Developmental Trauma Disorder (proposed)**

Developmental Trauma Disorder Domains of Impairment

Proposed

Bessel van der Kolk MD

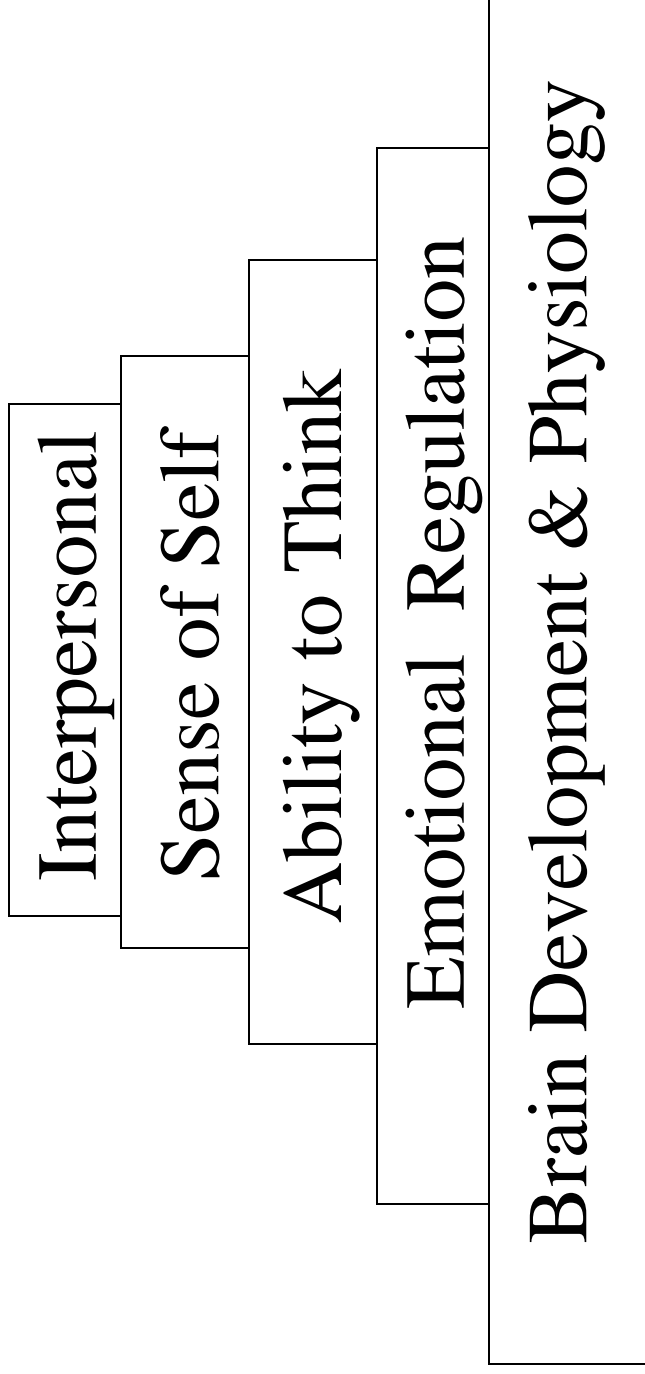
www.traumacenter.org

Developmental Trauma Disorder

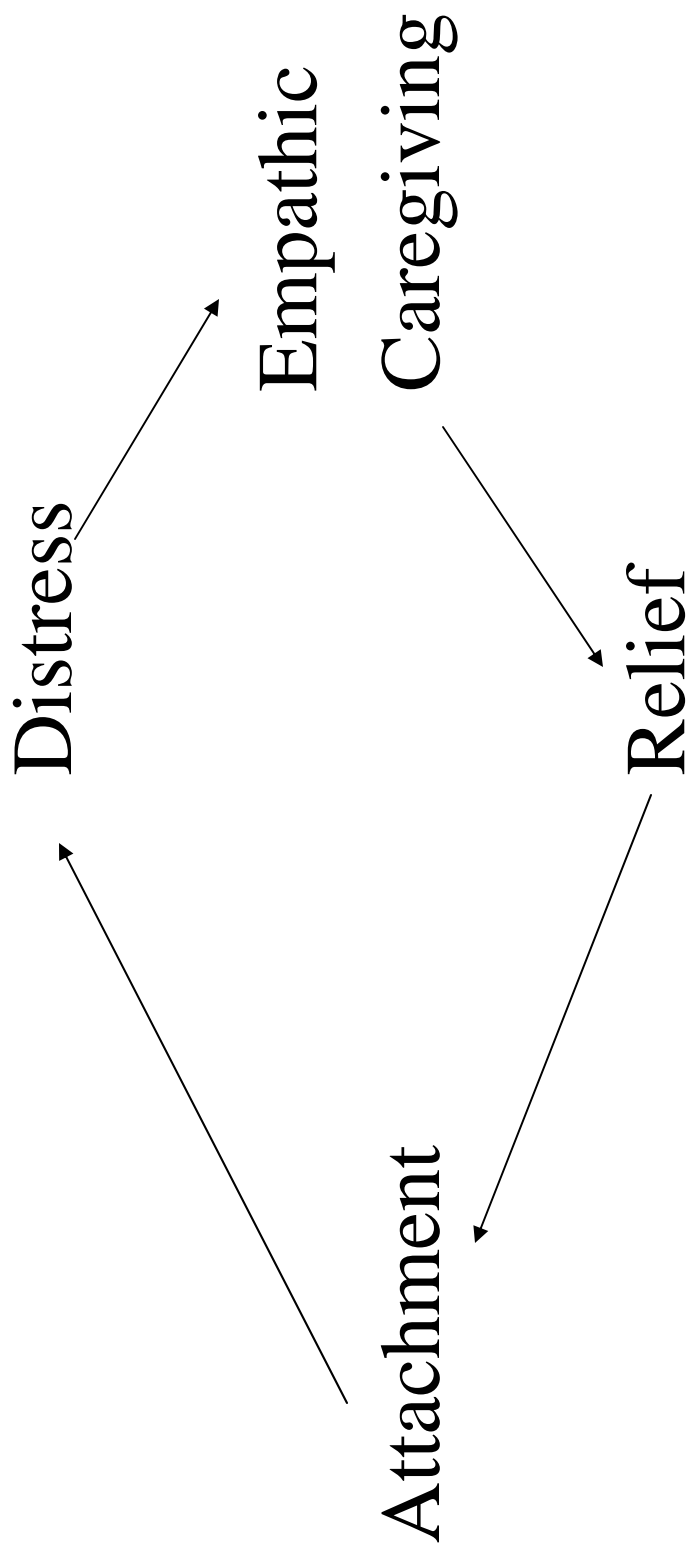
Domains of Impairment

- Attachment
- Biology/Physiology
- Affect Regulation
- Dissociation
- Behavioral Control
- Cognitions
- Self Concept

Developmental Effects



Distress-Relief Cycle



Benefits

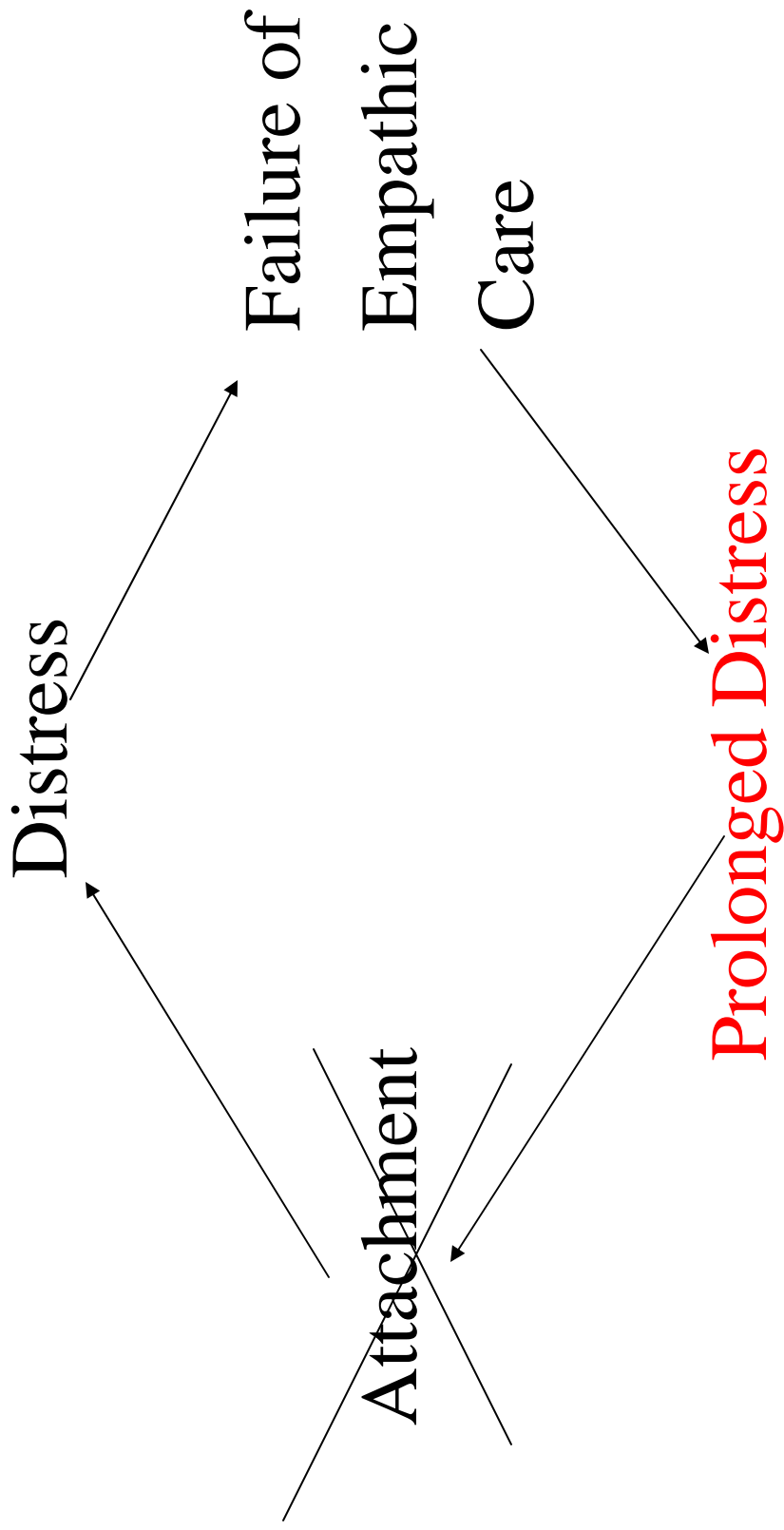
- Reciprocity (give & take)
- Effectance (I can effect behavior in others
→ therefore, “I matter”)
- Trust
- Interest → Attention
- Reward → Joy
- Early templates of affect regulation

Attunement

→ *Increases regulation (“feeling felt by”)*

- Sympathy vs. Empathy

Distress → No Relief



Liabilities

- Impaired reciprocity;
- Impaired sense that “I matter”
- Impaired trust;
- Impaired interest → attention;
- Impaired reward → joy;
- Impaired affect regulation.

Importance of Misattunement

If managed effectively teaches:

- Negative feelings can be endured;
- Caregiver (others) as resource;
- Frustration tolerance;
- Increases resilience;
- Interactive repair.

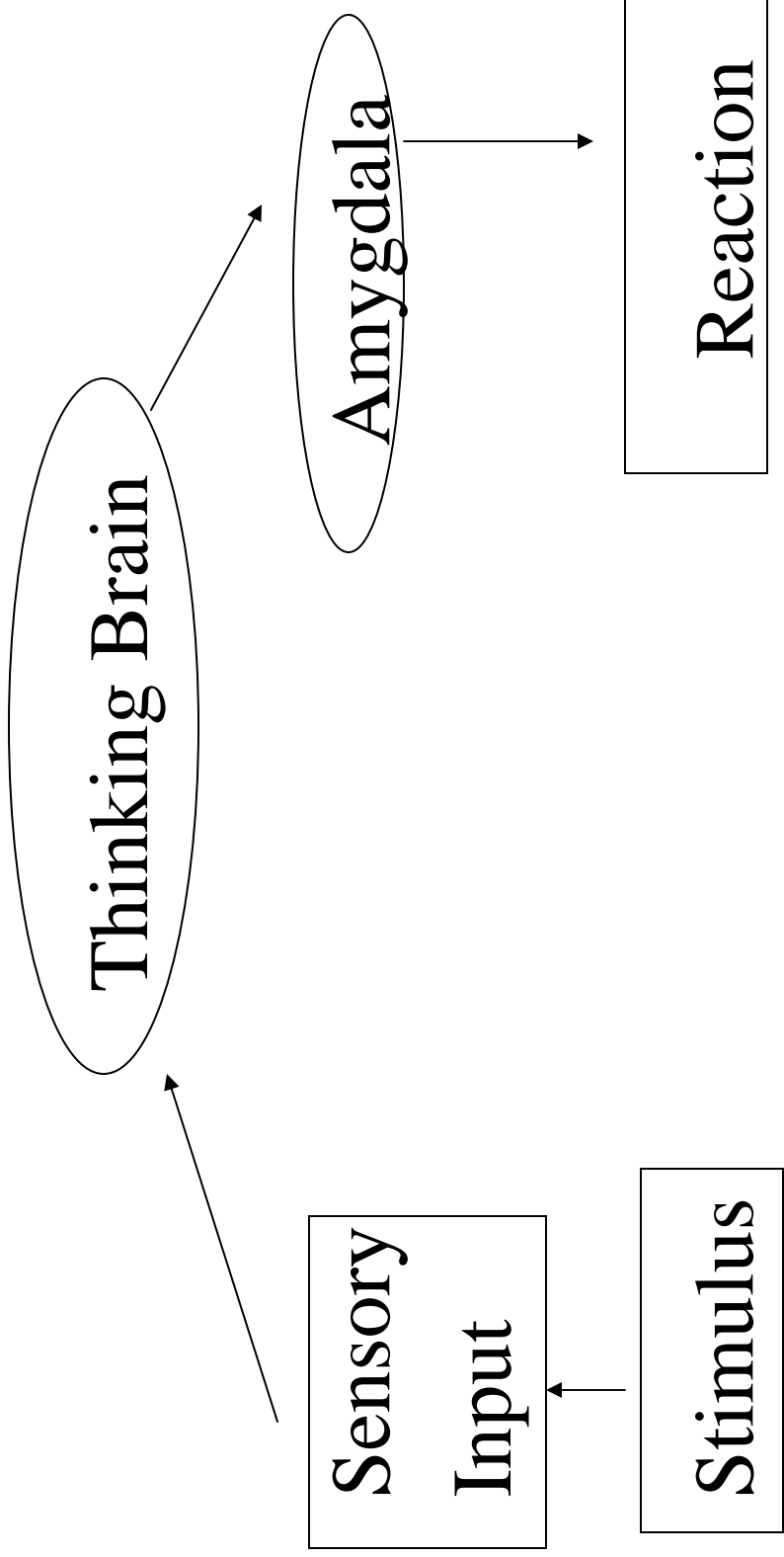
Misattunement: Not Handled

- Failures in interactive repair;
- Dysregulated shame and overwhelming affects → overwhelm coping;
- Impaired vocabulary for internal states;
- Not internalizing caregiver as resource;
- Affective biases.

Unrelieved Distress

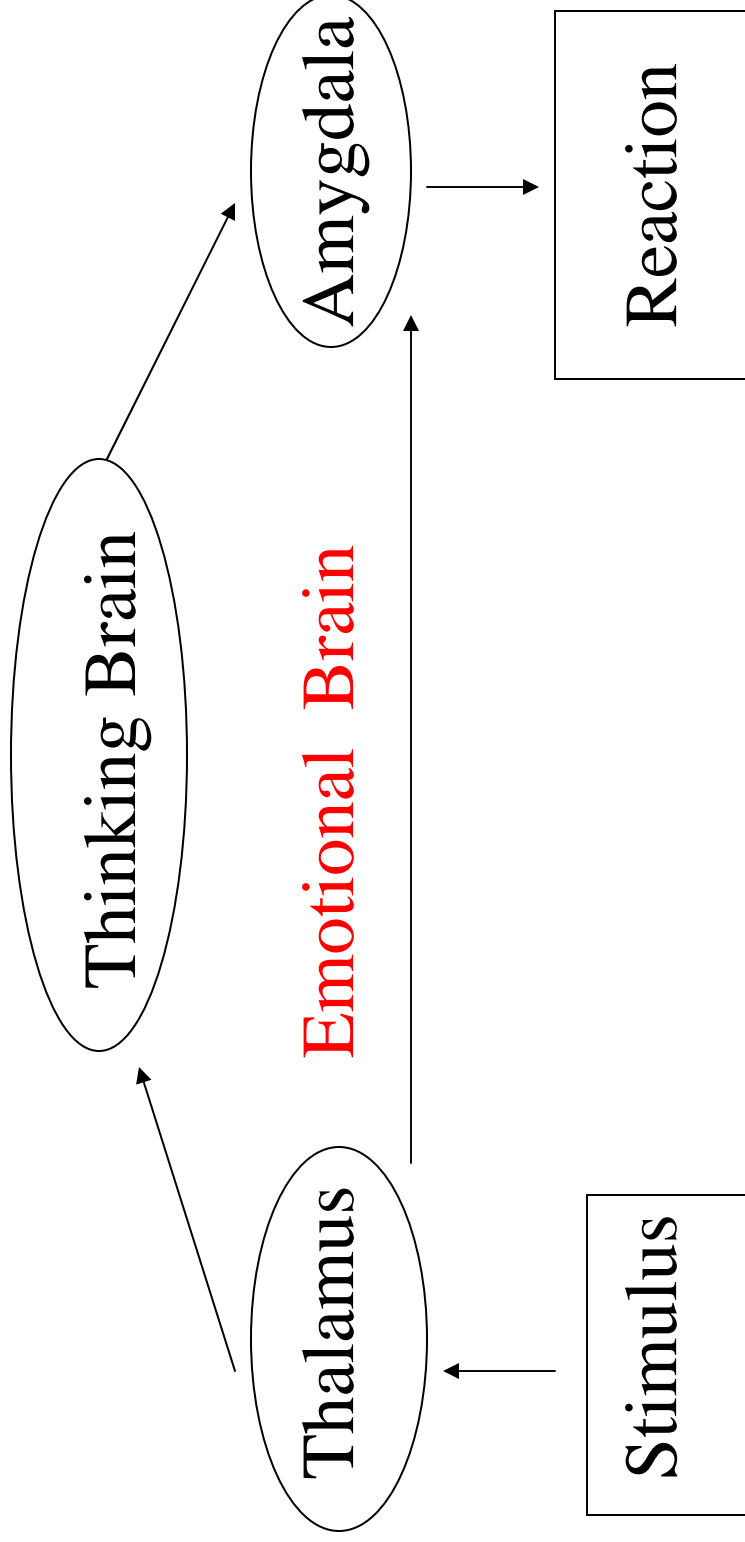
- Arousal → cortisol stress response;
- Numbing (endogenous opioids);
- Freezing;
- Compulsive self-reliance;

Conditioned Fear Responses (LeDoux)



Conditioned Fear Responses

(LeDoux)



Development of the Hemispheres

- *Left Hemisphere*
- Develops later
- Responsive to stability
- Promotes inhibition
- *Right Hemisphere*
- Develops earlier
- Responsive to activation (changes in the environment)
- Promotes activation

Roles of the Hemispheres

Left

- Language
- Sequential, logical
- Content
- Social emotions
- Guilt & remorse
- Pride
- Inhibition

Right

- Nonverbal communication
- Context
- Primary emotions
- Selective attention
- Tactile perceptions
- Internal representation

Maltreatment and Effects on Social Information Processing

- Distorted perceptions
- Hostile attributional bias (Ken Dodge)
- Impaired ability to think about one's thoughts and feelings
- Conclusions
- Limited recall and difficulty associating current behaviors with past maltreatment.

Internal Working Model

Secure

- I am lovable, worthy, capable, good.....
- Others are basically good, helpful, caring...
- The world is a safe & predictable place.

Insecure

- I am bad, defective, unworthy, unlovable...
- Others are hurtful, coercive, rejecting....
- The world is a dangerous , chaotic place.

**Perceptions + Beliefs →
Behavior**

Importance of a Coherent Narrative

- Make sense of life experiences;
- Challenge early ego-centric beliefs;
- Integrate positive and negative feelings;
- Acquire greater security in attachment.

Effects of Trauma on the Self System

- “False self”;
- Profound shame;
- Early maladaptive schemas or life scripts:
Abandonment, Mistrust,
Defectiveness/shame

Effects of Trauma on Interpersonal Functioning

- Deficits in empathy
- Deficits in social emotions;
- Deficits in pro-social behaviors;
- Deficits in moral development.

Empathy Training

- Attunement
- Empathy (subjective)
- Empathy (interpersonal)
- Recognizing feelings (affective)
- Taking perspective of other

Touchstones of Strategy

- *Safety* first and foremost!!!
- Developmental (not chronological) age
- Determine “Won’t” versus “Can’t”
- Corrective experiences of attunement so the child “feels felt by” another
- Making sense of experience
- Applied developmental psychology

Advocacy

- Establishing permanency
- Prevent multiple placements
- Educate parents (birth, foster, adoptive) to recognize trauma reactions and find ways to cope in constructive ways
- Advocate for the Developmental Trauma Disorder Diagnosis (www.dsm5.org)

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