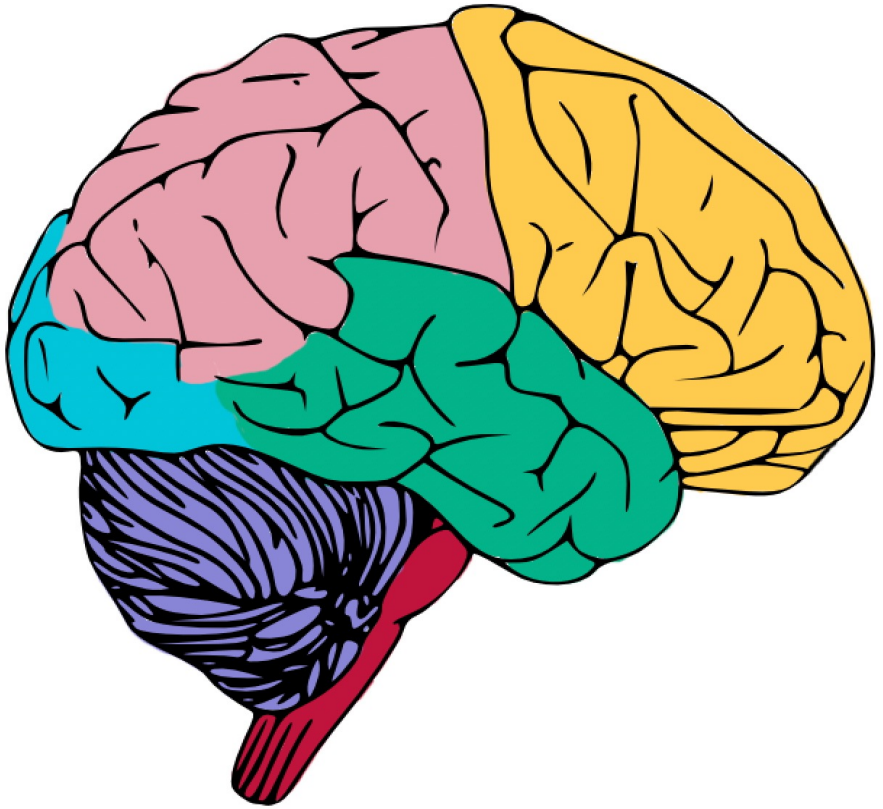
Trauma Informed Social Work

Module 1: Exploration of Core Concepts & Review of the Ecobiodevelopmental Model



Dr. Kerry Lee

Agenda

- Traumatic stress
- Complex Trauma
- Impact of traumatic stress on indicators of wellbeing
- Review of the ecobiodevelopmental model

Think, Pair, Share Check-In Exercise

- Please take a moment to reflect on the following then discuss with a partner:
  - How are you doing today, in this moment?
  - What do you need to fill your cup?
  - What are three things in this moment for which you are grateful?

Traumatic Stress

Traumatic Stress

Refers to ***exposure to one or more traumas*** throughout the life course that results in the development of reactions that persist and affect the individual's daily life after the traumatic event has ended.

Types of Trauma/ Traumatic Stress

Chronic Trauma

- Experiences of multiple traumatic events singly or in combination
- May be repeated
- Cumulative effects
- E.g., domestic violence

Complex Trauma

- Exposure to multiple and/or chronic trauma
- Has severe impact on the individual
- Occurs at a developmentally vulnerable time
- Affects caregiving relationships
- Varies in magnitude, complexity, frequency, duration, predictability and controllability
- Impacts identity formation, self regulation, and self integrity (the ability to feel whole)
- E.g., child maltreatment beginning in early childhood

Types of Trauma/ Traumatic Stress

Historical Trauma

- Events that negatively impacts generations across time
- E.g., racial trauma, oppression

Childhood Bereavement

- Refers to when someone important to a child dies.
- The death can be either sudden and unexpected (e.g., homicide, suicide, accident, accidental overdose) or anticipated (e.g., lengthy illness).

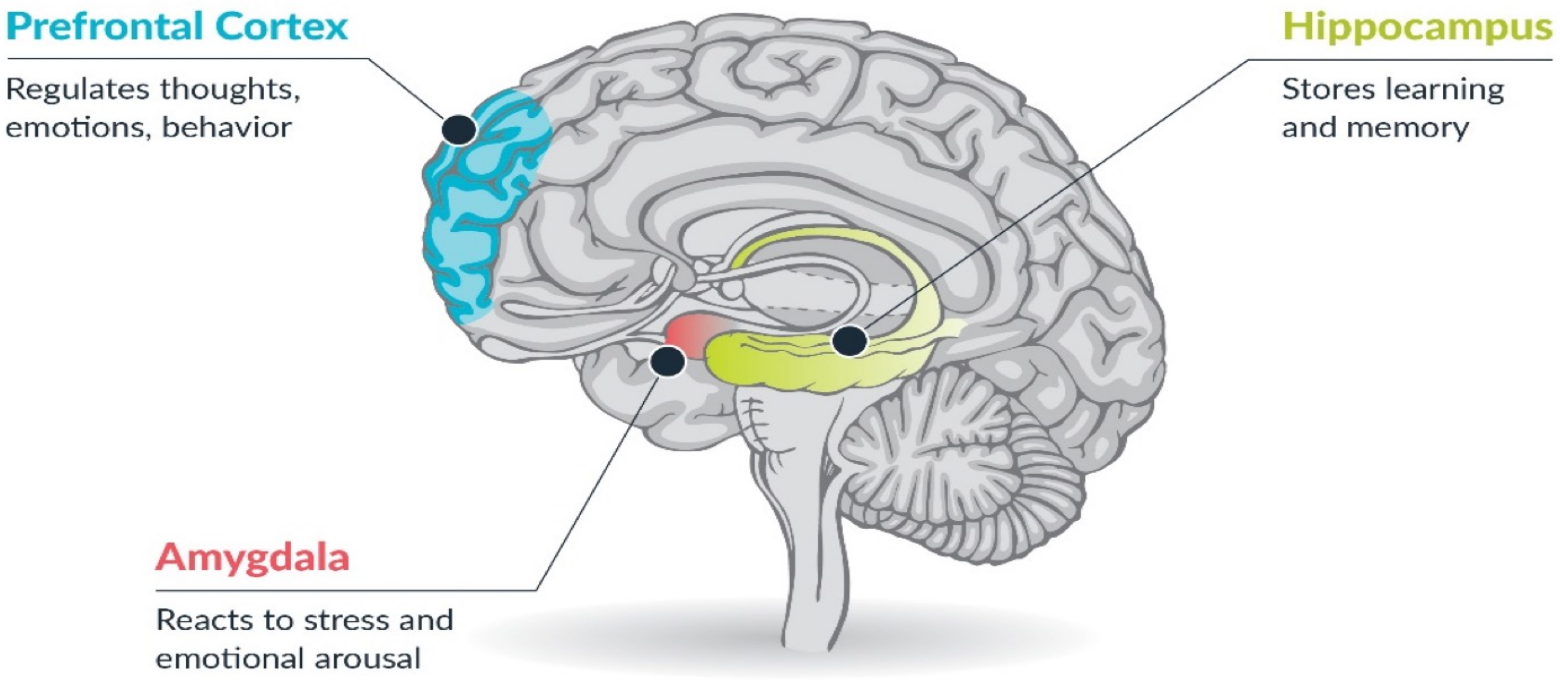
System-Induced Trauma

- Traumatic events associated with various systems (e.g., child welfare; juvenile)
- E.g., removal from home; multiple placement within a short timeframe

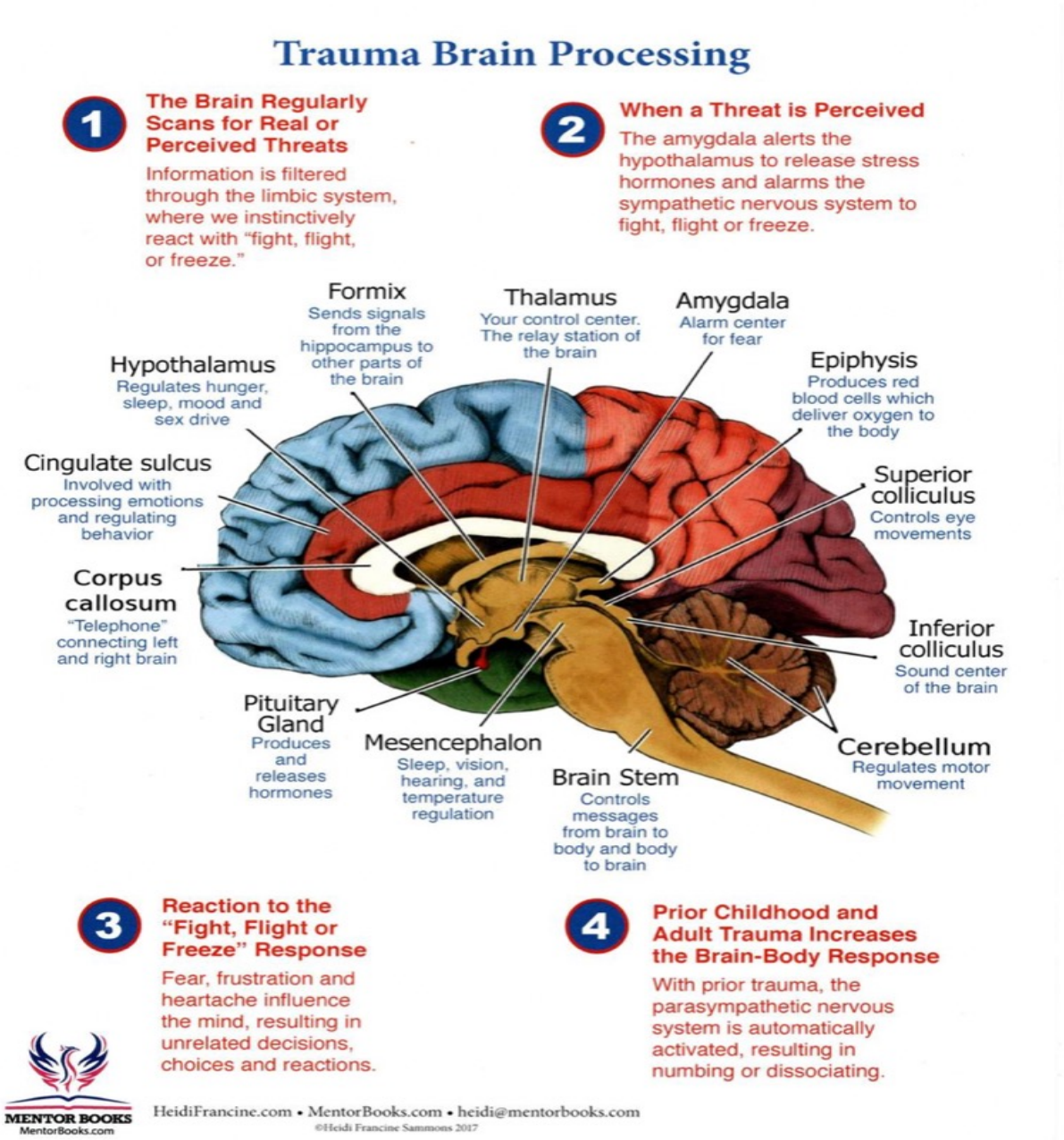
Traumatic Separation

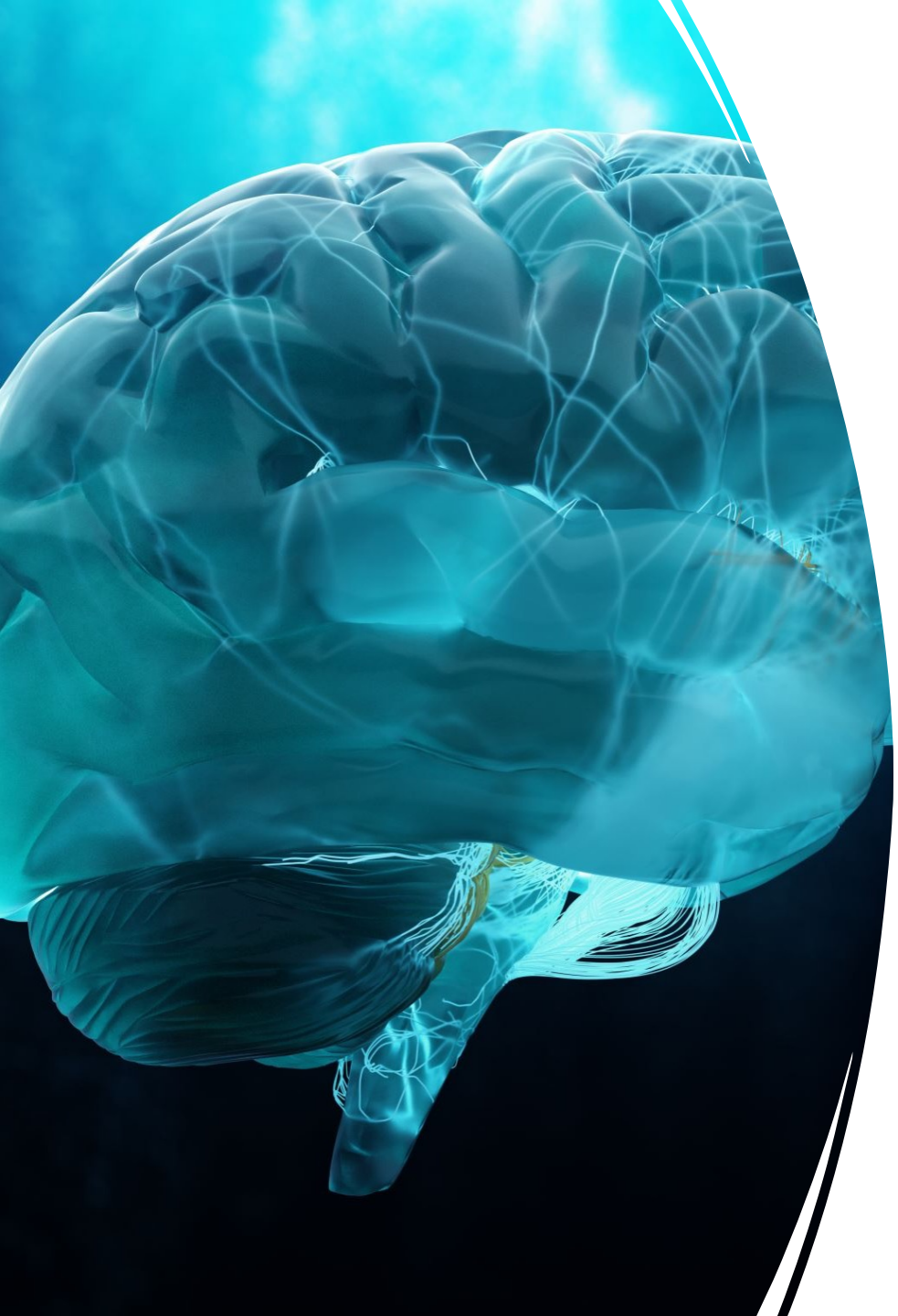
- Loss of a caregiver for varying length of time
- Accompanied by stressful or traumatic experiences

Areas of the Brain Most Commonly Affected By Traumatic Stress



Brain Processing of Trauma





Impact of Complex Trauma on Children's Development

- Attachment and relationships
- Physical health: Body and brain
- Emotional responses
- Dissociation
- Behavior
- Cognition: Thinking and learning
- Self-concept and future orientation
- Long-term health consequences
- Economic Impact

Impact of Complex Trauma on Children's Development

Attachment & Relationships

- Difficulties in relationships

Physical Health: Body & Brain

- Normal biological function is partly determined by environment
- When a child grows up afraid or under constant or extreme stress, the immune system and body's stress response systems may not develop normally
- Prepared for the bear even when there is no bear!
- The child or adult is exposed to even ordinary levels of stress, these systems may automatically respond as if the individual is under extreme stress.
- Stress in an environment can impair the development of the brain and nervous system.

Emotional Responses

- Difficulty identifying, expressing and managing emotions
- Limited language for feeling states ; Internalize or externalize stress

Impact of Complex Trauma on Children's Development

Dissociation

- Mentally separate from the experience

Behavior

- "Easily triggered"
- Struggle with self-regulation
- May appear oppositional, unpredictable, rigid, overcontrolled, etc.

Cognition: Thinking and Learning

- Problems thinking clearly, reasoning, or problem solving

Impact of Complex Trauma on Children's Development

Self-concept & Future Orientation

- Self-worth is learned from reactions of others
- Trauma may make a child feel worthless and shame, guilt and low self-esteem are common
- Learn that the world is not safe & they are powerless to change their circumstances

Long-Term Health Consequences

- Trauma exposure linked to increased medical conditions throughout individuals' lives
- ACE Study → results indicated that nearly 64% of participants experienced at least 1 exposure
- Results demonstrated connection between childhood trauma exposure, high-risk behaviors & chronic illness.

Economic Impact

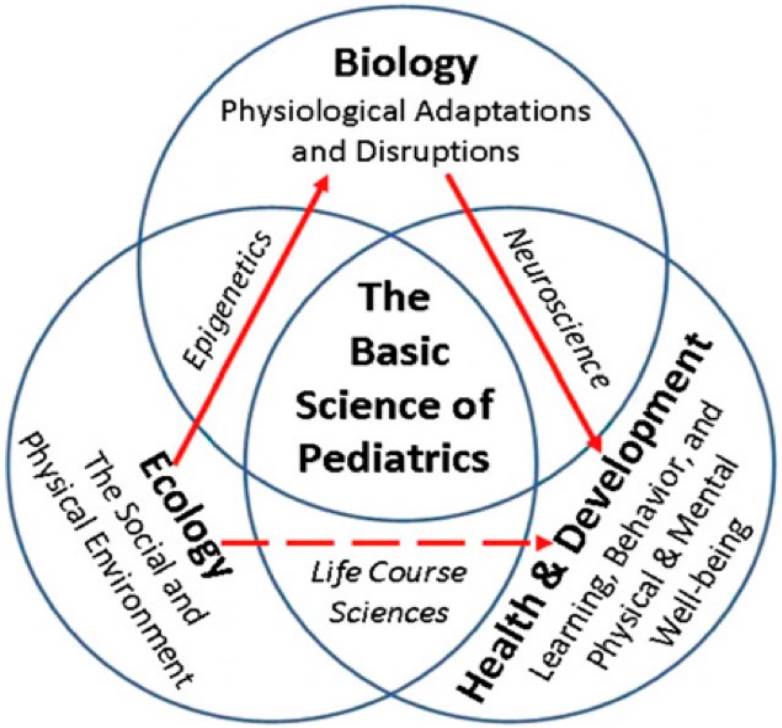
- Cumulative economic and social burden is extremely high
- $103.billion (annual cost of child abuse & neglect) [indirect & direct costs]


BE RIGHT
BACK!!


Bathroom
break

The EcoBioDevelopmental Framework

EcoBioDevelopmental Framework



- Early social and environmental experiences (the ecology) + genetic predispositions (the biology) influence the development of:
  - adaptive behaviors, learning capacities, lifelong physical and mental health, and future economic productivity

Source: Shonkoff et al. (2012)

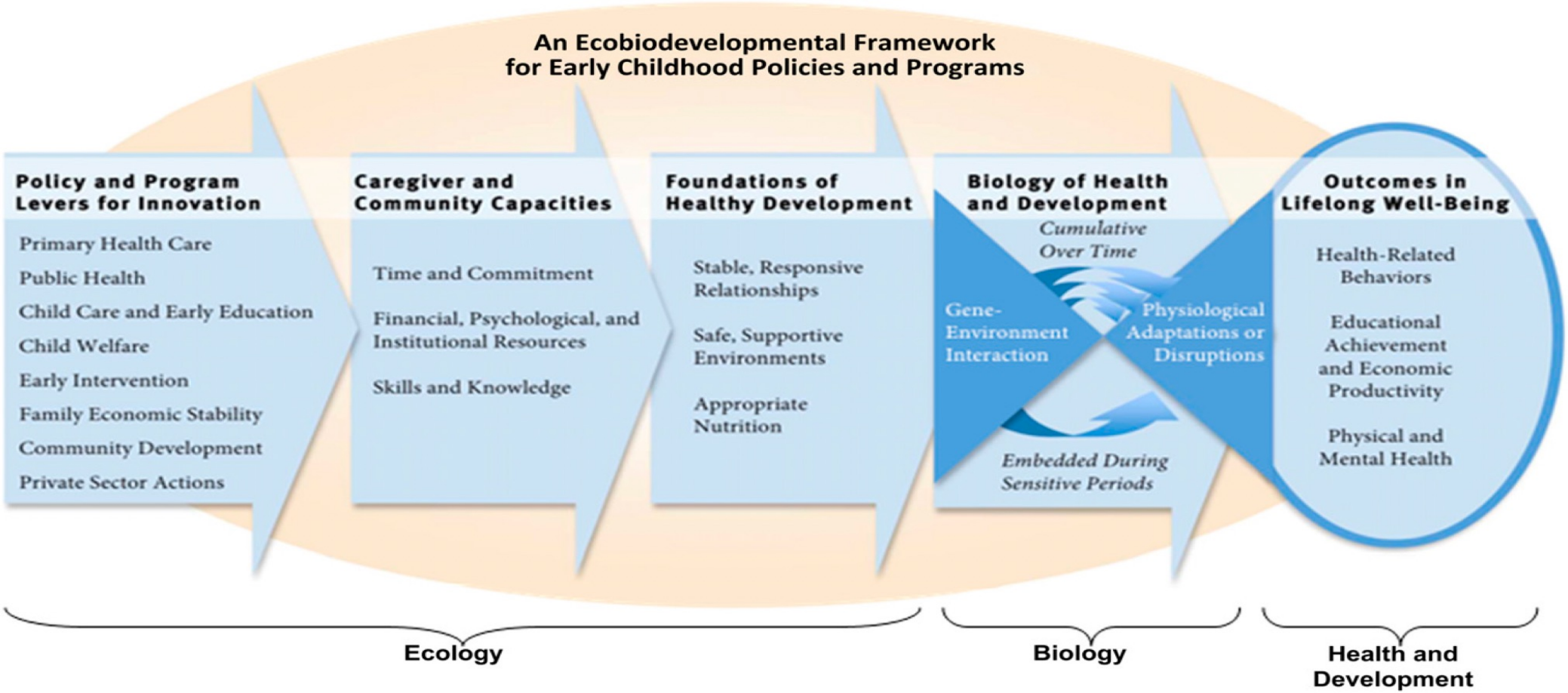
Nature vs. Nurture? OR Nature & Nurture?

- EBD – a way to help physicians and policy makers think about how early childhood adversity can lead to lifelong impairments in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.

- Development is an ongoing process between:
  - Nature = biology (i.e., genetic predisposition)
  - Nurture = ecology (i.e., social and physical environment)

- Epigenetics and developmental neuroscience demonstrates that early childhood ecology is biologically embedded within the body and continues to influence behavior, learning, and health for years, even decades

EcoBioDevelopmental Framework



Source: Shonkoff et al. (2012)

EBD Framework Snapshot . . .

Childhood ecology is biologically embedded into the way the genetic program is read and, in the way, **the foundational architecture of the brain is formed**

Results in **a cumulative and dynamic dance (between the ecology and one's biological program) that drives developmental outcomes across the lifespan**

Key Findings for the EBD Framework

Early experiences with significant stress are critical, because they can undermine the development of those adaptive capacities and coping skills needed to deal with later challenges in life

The roots of unhealthy lifestyles, fragmented social networks, and maladaptive coping patterns, are found in behavioral and physiologic responses to significant adversity that emerge in early childhood

The prevention of long-term, adverse consequences is best achieved by the buffering protection afforded by stable, responsive relationships that help children develop a sense of safety → *facilitating the restoration of their stress response systems to baseline*

Source: Shonkoff et al. (2012)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VB-BNlauWUs

Small Group Activity

(15 minutes)

Food For Thought

"Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves." (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 98)