

An Introduction to Becoming a Trauma-Informed Big



Julie Novak, VP of Child Safety

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America



☐ Served 13 years with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

- BBBSA's leading child protection expert
- National Board Member, The U.S. Center for SafeSport
- Former SafeSport Advisory Committee Member, U.S. Olympic Committee
- President, National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation
- Member, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Bullying and Safe to Compete Advisory Committees

☐ Served 11 years as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwestern Wisconsin

- Administered federally funded violence prevention initiatives
- Collaborated closely with WI-DOJ, Prevent Child Abuse WI, Dept. of Child & Family Services, and Local Law Enforcement

☐ Served 3 years as an Advocate for victims of domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault after graduating from the University of Iowa

Angie Scott, Associate Director, Child Safety Big Brothers Big Sisters of America



- ❑ Supports the research and advancement of effective child protection strategies across Big Brothers Big Sisters' nationwide network of affiliated agencies
- ❑ Provided direct service to children and families for 4 years through Big Brothers Big Sisters in Tampa, Florida
- ❑ Experienced in working with child and adult survivors of violence and trauma
- ❑ Holds a Masters Degree in Counseling and a Bachelors Degree in Psychology
- ❑ Trained in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



Everyone you meet is
fighting a battle you know
nothing about.

Be kind.

Always.

Why do we need to understand trauma?

How Trauma Affects Development

Inability to regulate emotions

Hypersensitivity to physical contact

May experience somatic symptoms

Difficulty paying attention and delayed speech and language

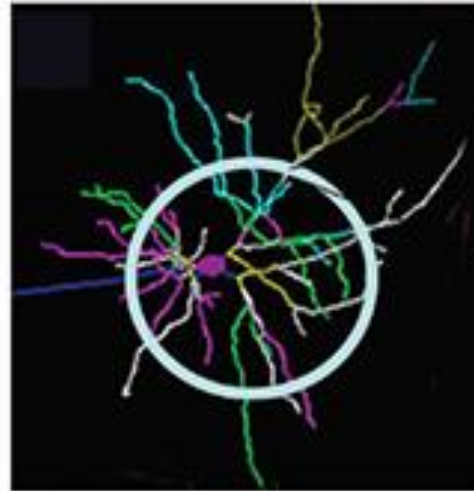
Impacts child's ability to trust and relate to others

Increases cortisol levels in amygdala resulting in "toxic stress"

Persistent Stress Changes Brain Architecture

Effects of
Toxic Stress
on Brain
Development

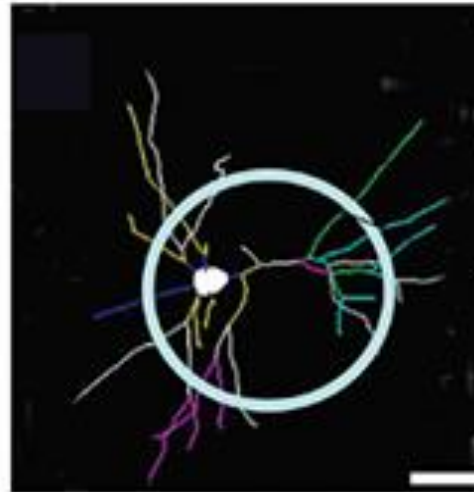
Normal



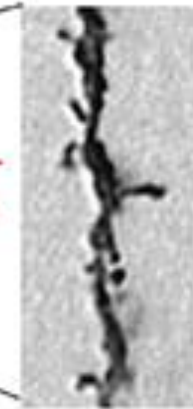
Typical neuron—
many connections



Toxic
stress



Damaged neuron—
fewer connections



Prefrontal Cortex and
Hippocampus

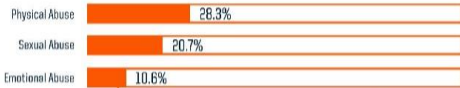
WHAT ARE THEY?

ACEs *are*
ADVERSE
CHILDHOOD
EXPERIENCES

HOW PREVALENT ARE ACEs?

The ACE study* revealed the following estimates:

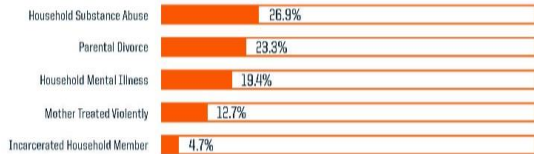
ABUSE



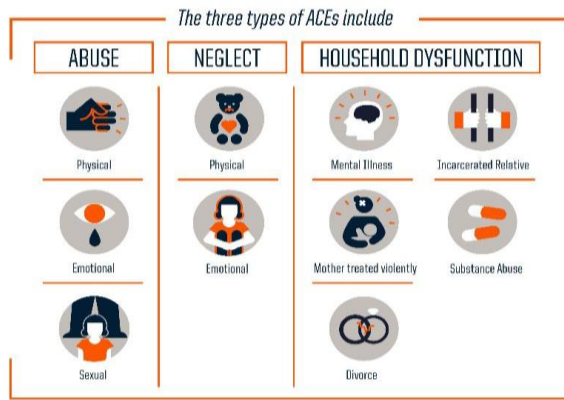
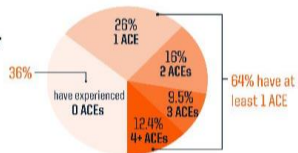
NEGLECT



HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

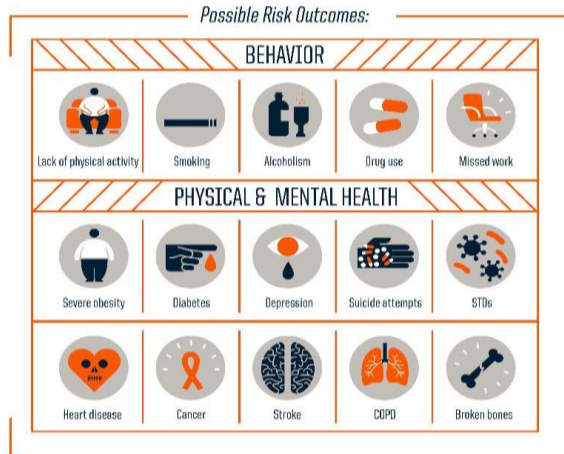


Of 17,000 ACE study participants:



WHAT IMPACT DO ACEs HAVE?

As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative health outcomes



The Truth About ACEs

- The ACE study was conducted in the late 1990's by the CDC and Kaiser Permanente
- Asked over 17,000 adults about their experiences growing up
- Used 10 questions to assess the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences each participant had been exposed to
- As the number of risks increase, so does likelihood for cancer, heart disease, COPD, drug and alcohol use, depression, suicidal thoughts/ attempts, etc.

Prevalence of Trauma in the United States

26% of children in the U.S. will witness or experience a traumatic event before age 4

70% of adults in the U.S. have experienced some type of traumatic event at least once in their lives

60% of youth report having been exposed to violence or victimization within the past year

Almost half of middle school students in urban schools reported seeing a stabbing or shooting

Types of Trauma

Physical, emotional or sexual abuse

Neglect

Witnessing violence in the home or community

Having an incarcerated parent

Being removed from a caregiver

Natural Disasters

Serious accident or illness

Significant loss

Youth who have been exposed to trauma may show symptoms of trauma exposure... or none at all.

Trouble sleeping

Difficulty focusing in school

Increased startle response

Separation anxiety

Fearful or anxious behaviors

Withdrawing from friends or family

Physical complaints like headaches or stomachaches

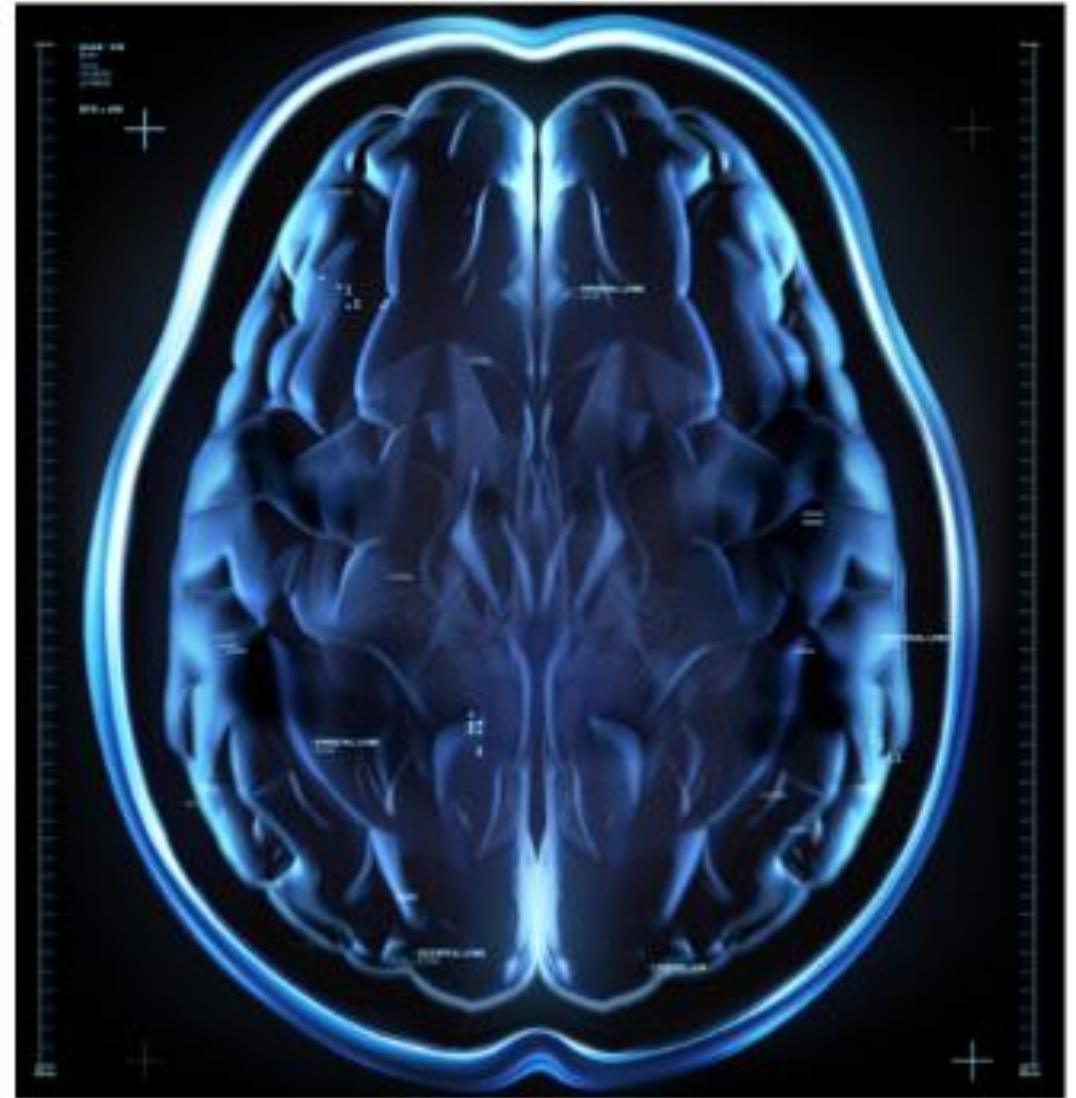
Difficulty trusting others

Where do
you come
in?

"SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH POINTS TO THE PRESENCE OF A STABLE,
CARING ADULT... AS THE KEY TO BUILDING THE SKILLS OF
RESILIENCE."

DR. JACK SHONKOFF, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Trauma can change a kid's mind, but your everyday gestures can help them heal.



WITNESSING VIOLENCE CAN **CHANGE A KID'S MIND.**

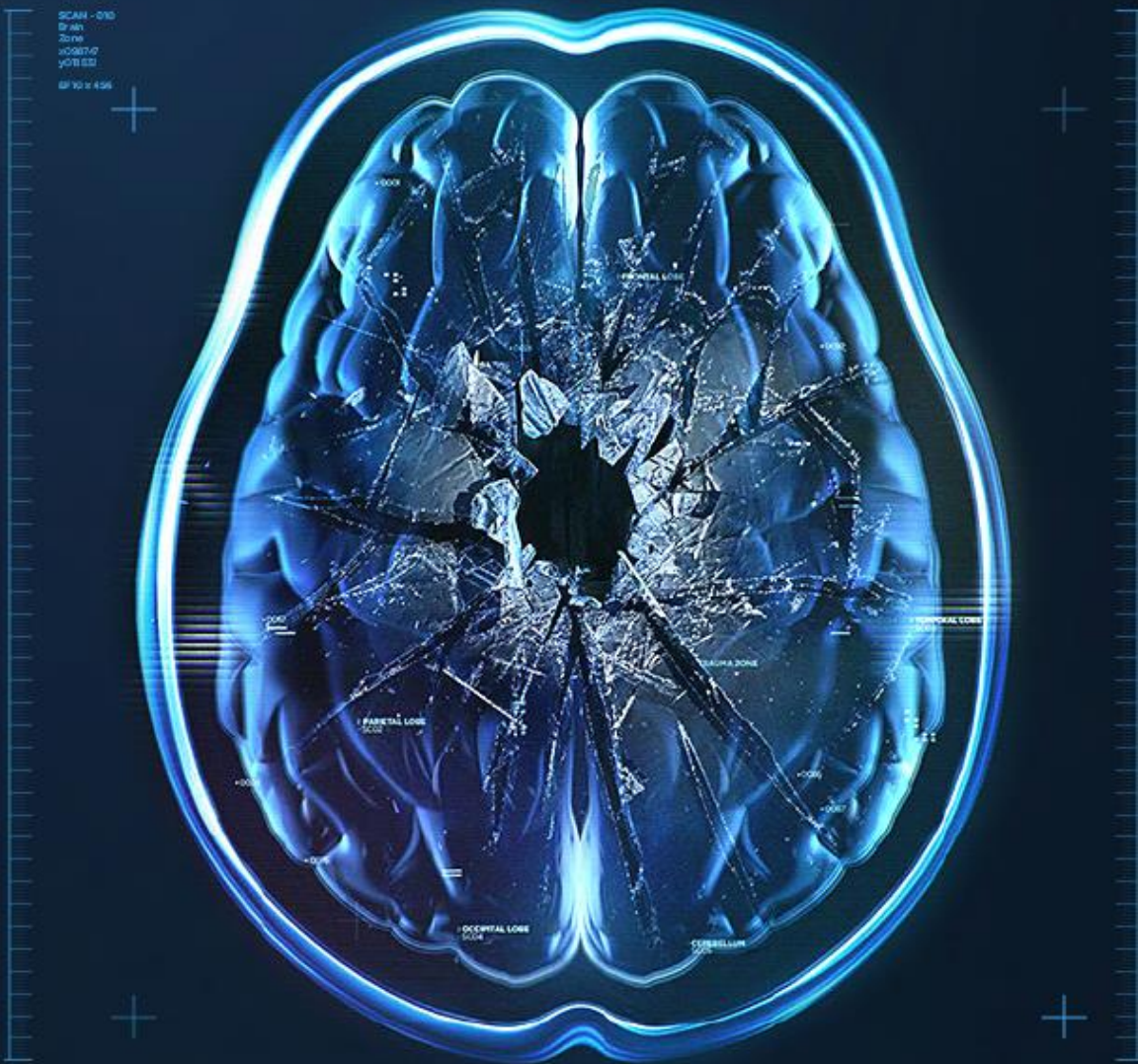
YOU CAN HELP **THEM HEAL.**

New research shows that witnessing traumatic events — like domestic violence, shootings, or even fighting — can physically damage a child's brain. But the damage can be undone. This site will teach you about the science of childhood trauma, and how your everyday gestures can make a world of difference.

[LEARN THE HEALING GESTURES](#) [+]



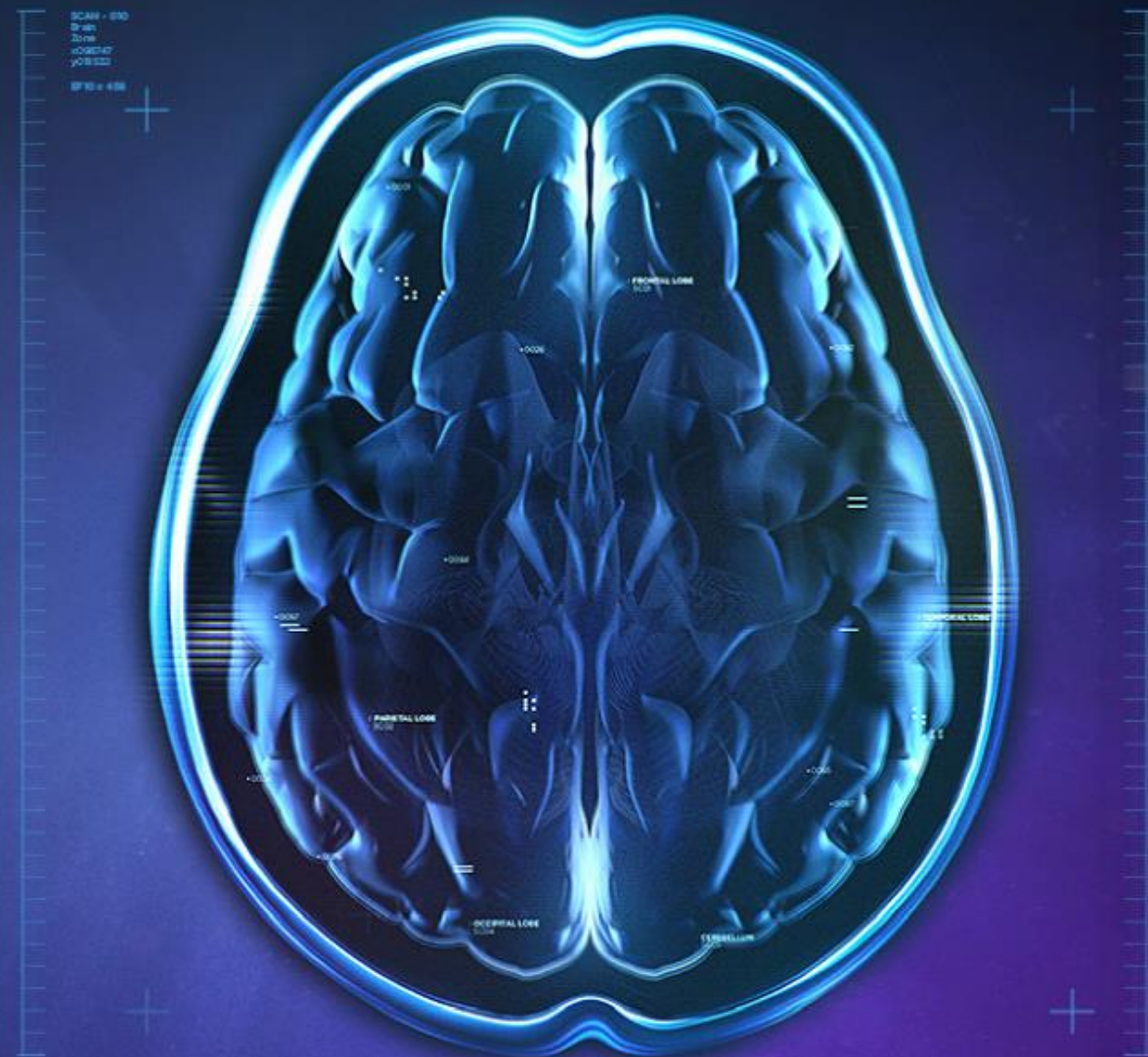
[SEE CHAD'S STORY](#) [+]

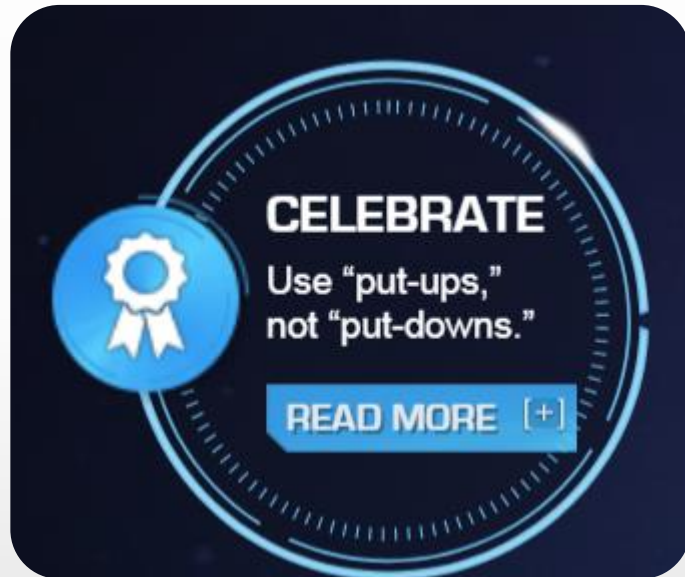


GESTURES THAT CAN HEAL

As a supportive, caring adult in a child's life, your relationship with them could be the most important factor in helping them overcome trauma. Here's what you can do:

- CELEBRATE**
Use "put-ups," not "put-downs."
[READ MORE \[+\]](#)
- COMFORT**
Stay calm and patient.
[READ MORE \[+\]](#)
- COLLABORATE**
Ask for their opinions.
[READ MORE \[+\]](#)
- LISTEN**
Show an interest in their passions.
[READ MORE \[+\]](#)
- INSPIRE**
Expose them to new ideas.
[READ MORE \[+\]](#)





When we celebrate a child's achievements and challenges, both big and small, and affirm who they are as individuals, we support the development of their self-identity and remind them of their competence, importance and lovability.

Studies show that an essential ingredient for a child's resilience, particularly in a child who has experienced violence and traumatic stress, is a secure relationship between a child and a caring adult who believes in them, sees them as special, and celebrates their accomplishments.

How can Bigs celebrate their Littles?

- Provide positive reinforcement and praise when they put forth effort or make good choices
- Identify your Little's strengths and talents and incorporate those into outings/meetings
- Find activities that your Little enjoys and spend time just having fun
- Be encouraging and validating in interactions with your Little
 - High fives and rounds of applause

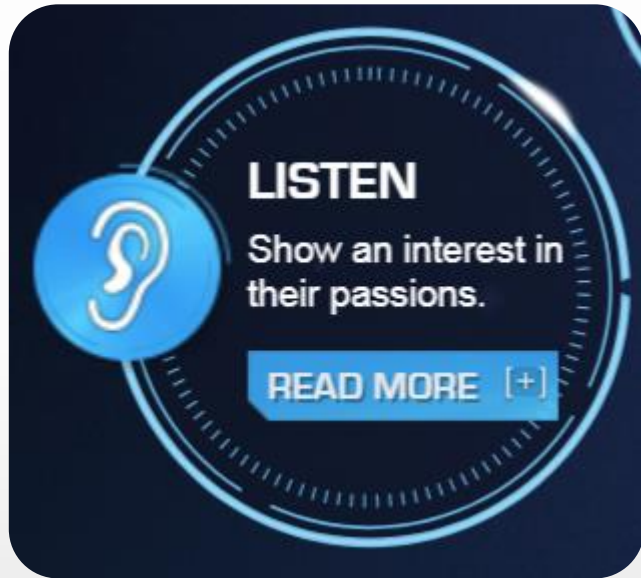
Studies show that adults who provide consistent emotional and physical support can better the “fight or flight” stress response in children. Teaching them how to manage their emotions and calm themselves down, helping them connect their words to feelings, and practicing relaxation and emotional regulation skills can also help.

Creating a safe environment is one of the most valuable elements of the Comfort gesture that helps children re-establish a sense of security and stability.



How can Bigs be a source of comfort?

- Build trust by being dependable and following through with commitments
 - Provide advance notice when rescheduling/canceling outings
- Help Little's practice expressing their feelings
 - "How did that make you feel?"
- Practice positive self-talk
 - "Here are some things that went well since the last time we met..."
- Practice relaxation techniques
 - Counting to ten before responding, deep breathing exercises



Listening is a gesture we practice every day. For all children, especially those who have experienced traumatic stress and violence, a patient and receptive adult who listens can help them feel safe and valued.

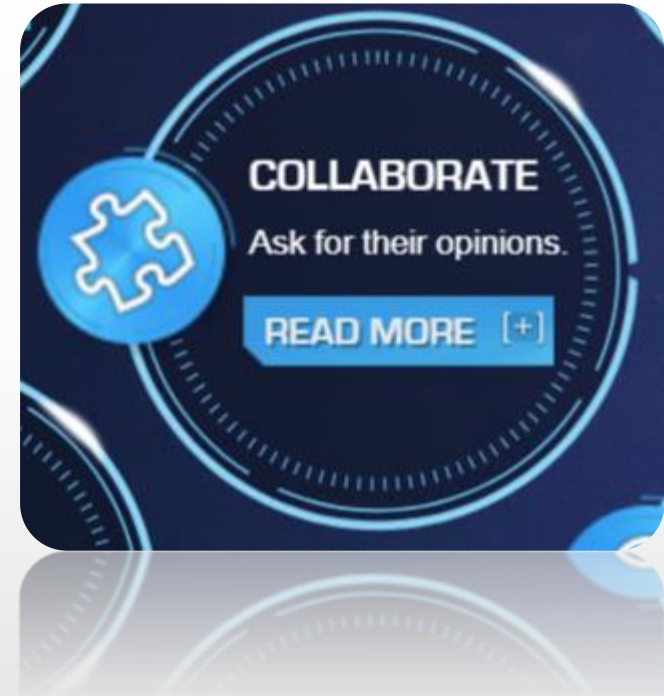
Listening attentively to children shows we care and that their thoughts matter. Teaching them to listen helps embody the skills of communication, getting along and seeing others' perspectives.

What does it mean to listen?

- Allow your Little to speak without interruption
- Ask your Little questions about their life and show interest as they respond
- Ask your Little for their input and take their suggestions into consideration when planning outings/meetings
- Ask open-ended questions that will elicit a greater response
 - *“What do you like about school?”*
instead of *“How is school going?”*

Teaching children who have experienced traumatic stress how to collaborate can help them learn strategies to effectively address conflict and deal with adversity.

But science shows that children who have been exposed to toxic stress may struggle with seeing and understanding others' perspectives. They may lack a sense of belonging or even the will and know-how to reach out. And they may need help controlling their emotions, working through their problems, and gaining independence.



How can Bigs collaborate with their Littles?

- Model problem-solving skills
 - Share stories on instances where you had to problem-solve to resolve a situation
 - Think through situations out loud when you're with your Little
 - "I think I made a wrong turn back there. I'm going to pull over to check those directions, in case we need to turn around."
- Resist the urge to solve your Little's problems for them- ask what they think they should do first
- Demonstrate thinking ahead and encourage your Little to practice doing the same
- Help your Little practice taking other people's perspectives
 - "How do you think they felt in that moment?" "How would you feel if that happened to you?"
- Provide praise to your Little for trying to problem-solve, even if it didn't go as planned



To inspire through motivation, encouragement or influence, is a gesture that is essential for children to recognize their potential and believe in possibilities in their lives and future.

Children who have witnessed violence and experienced traumatic stress aren't always inspired in the same way. They can become negative, often have a low sense of self-worth, expect to be unsuccessful, and fail to foresee a positive future.

But caring adults can help children reverse this negative response to toxic stress. You can help inspire and build resiliency in children by identifying their strengths and natural talents and by connecting them to programs that help develop self-confidence.

How can Bigs inspire their Little?

- Engage in both activities in which they can thrive and others that take practice
- Expose your Little to new ideas, places, and activities to help them identify likes and interests
- Encourage your Little to take a growth mindset
 - Things might seem hard initially, but with practice you will get better.
- Talk about setting goals and work with your Little to identify steps needed to accomplish goals
- Talk to your Little about your career, how you got there, and what you like about it
- Demonstrate examples of positive thinking

The Importance of Taking Care of Yourself





- For more ways that caring adults can help youth build the skills of resilience visit:
 - www.changingmindsnow.org
 - <http://www.nctsn.org/>
 - <http://www.heysigmund.com/building-resilience-children/>

Additional
Resources

Questions?



