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ACCEL

TEEN PROGRAM CURRICULUM

DEVELOPED BY

REACT

TIMFLETCHER.CA

THRIVING BEYOND™
COMPLEX TRAUMA

Contents

WORKBOOK

Website: timfletcher.ca
E-mail: contact@timfletcher.ca

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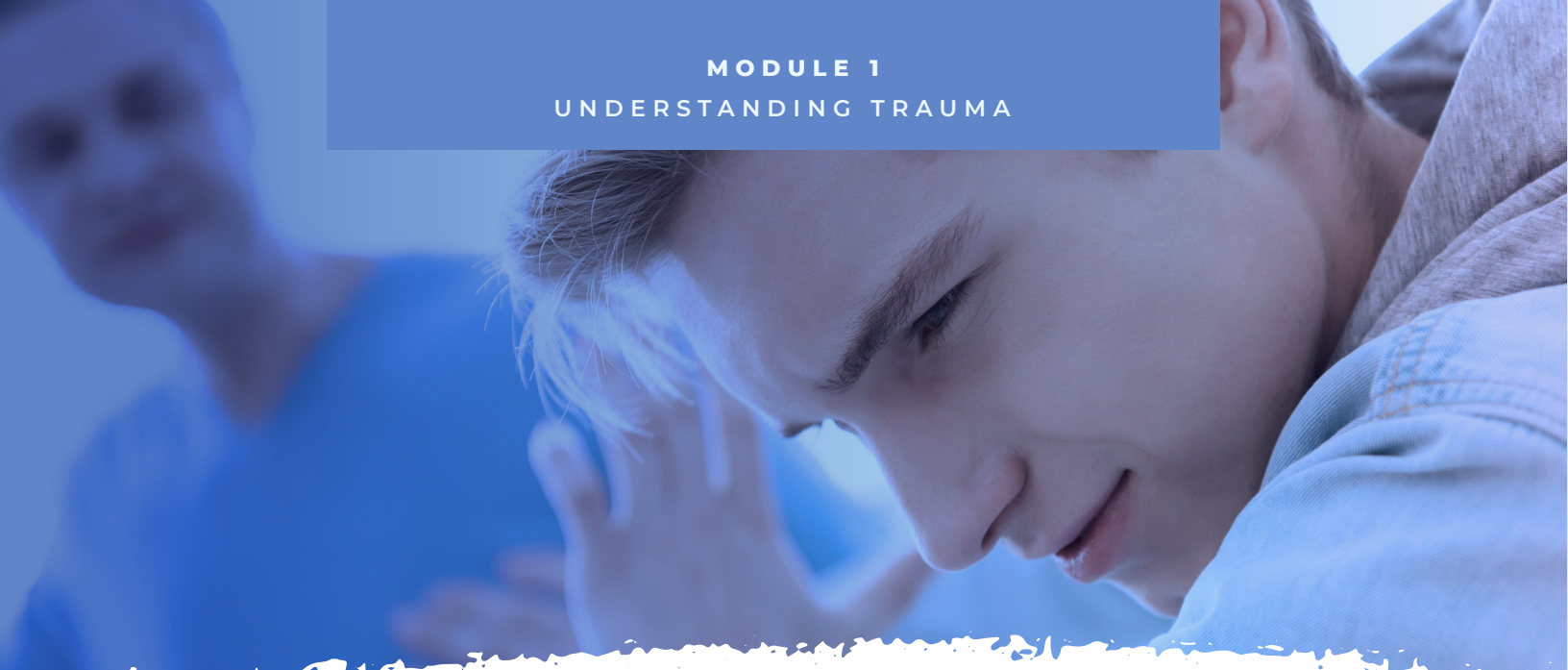


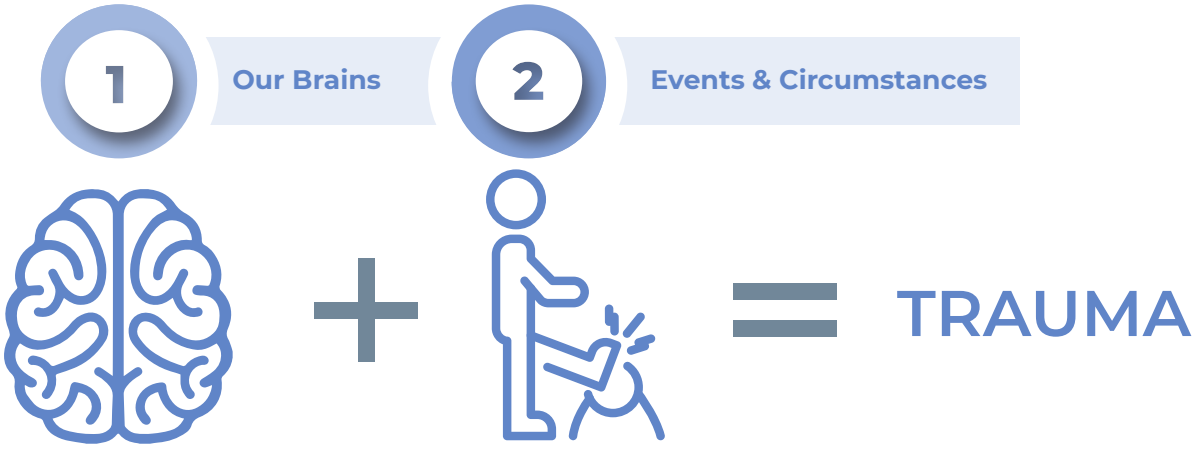
"If what we are thinking and doing isn't working, we have to learn and do what works!"

INTRODUCTION TO

THE BRAIN

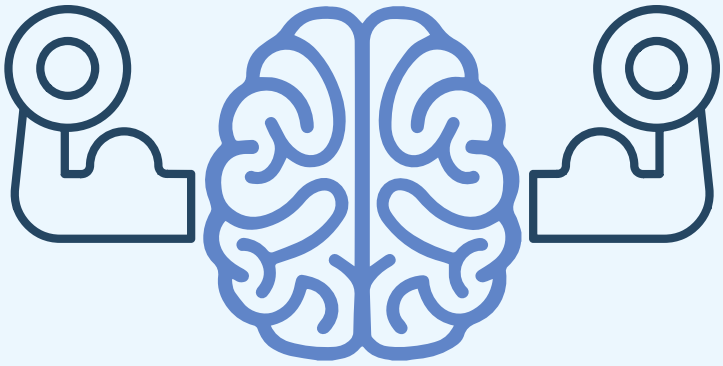
Trauma is not what happens to you; trauma is what happens inside you as a result of what happens to you. - Dr. Gabor Maté

In order to correctly understand trauma, we need to learn about the two aspects of it: our brains, and the events and circumstances we experience in life. The combination of these may or may not lead to trauma - it all depends on our ability to live, cope and relate.



FASCINATING FACTS

- Your brain is a muscle.
- Brains work in similar ways to the muscles you see on your body (on your legs, arms).
- It is made of several of the same materials as your other muscles.
- As brains grow and develop they get stronger (just like your other muscles).
- Try flexing your arm and watch your bicep expand and contract.
- Compare your muscles to other students'. Each person's muscle structure is different (large - small).
- People are born this way and are prone to having bigger or smaller muscles than others.
- Working out and exercise can give you bigger and stronger muscles - the same goes for your brain.



- Each person is born with a brain that has unique qualities.
- One big difference between the brain and the other muscles in your body is that the brain learns at a rapid rate through experiences it encounters.
- Babies go through multiple experiences at a time.
- Their brains absorb information like a sponge.
- Pathways are formed and learning behaviours are established before birth.
- These pathways and learning behaviours are what help babies learn to walk at around 1 year old.
- Tumbling and getting up over and over again allows the baby to learn to walk.
- Thousands of motor functions need to be mastered before actual walking takes place!
- Compare this to how horses develop in the womb and their first few moments outside. Baby horses (or foals) can walk within hours after they are born. Discuss why this might be?

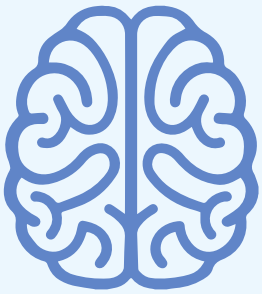
LIVE, COPE & RELATE

The brain is pretty incredible. Humans require attachment and bonding for several years after we are born before we can become independent enough to be on our own.

Let's go back to the sponge analogy.

After you are born, your brain learns three basic functions: **live, cope and relate**.

1. These functions all work together to help us survive.
2. They need to be learned in a healthy way in order to thrive.
3. The environment our brain encounters has a big effect on how we live, cope and relate.

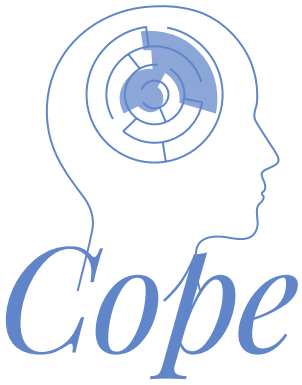


LIVE	COPE	RELATE
LIVE - things like crying will result in being fed or comforted.	**COPE** - self-soothing like sucking on a thumb. Did you know this skill can be mastered in the womb?	**RELATE** - smiling at others, cooing and making hand and arm movements.

A closer look at LIVE

LIVE is:

- Who you are
- What you love
- What helps you grow
- What you bring to the world
- What you believe
- Becoming the best version of the real you
- Finding your purpose in the world - growing, developing and reproducing.



A closer look at COPE

Cope is learning how to deal with:

- Pressure
- Problems
- New situations
- Danger
- Emotions
- Facing responsibilities, obstacles, stress or difficulties.

A closer look at RELATE

RELATE is building connections with:

- Yourself
- Family, friends or pets
- Strangers (boundaries)
- Technology (boundaries)
- The world
- Higher power

Includes setting and enforcing boundaries, understanding relationships, feeling sympathy/ empathy, talking and behaving in appropriate and respectful ways with others and building connections. Entails things more specifically like: speaking up when you are hurt or afraid, sharing your emotions with others or letting yourself cry when upset.

TRAUMA WOUNDS

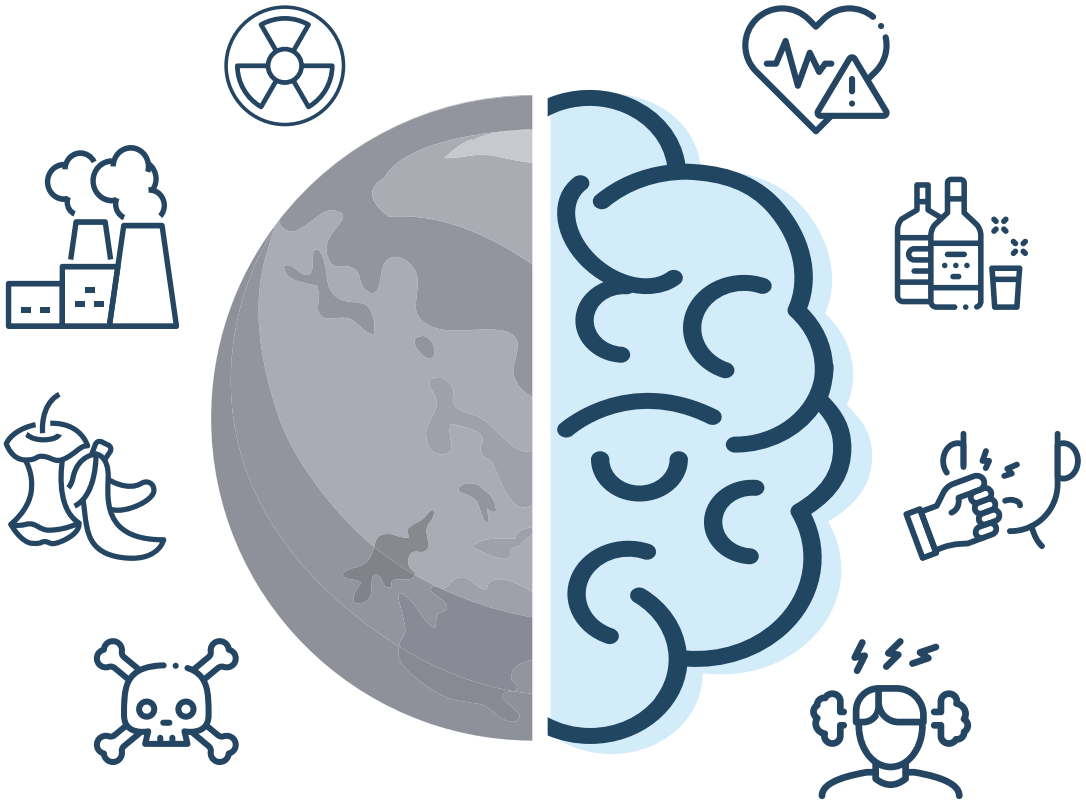
Trauma wounds are caused by stressors that occur in sudden and forceful ways that become incredibly overwhelming.

Trauma is your response to a deeply scary or harmful event that makes you unable to cope. It leaves you feeling helpless, makes you feel worthless, and numbs your emotions and memories.

Trauma causes us to feel like we will be hurt, we might go crazy or even die. Trauma stimulates a stress response in our brains because our brains are designed to protect ourselves.

TRAUMA HAS A POLLUTION-LIKE EFFECT ON OUR BRAIN AND CAN LEAVE US FEELING VERY HURT.

It's easy to see how pollution can harm the planet, but it is not as easy to see how pollution can harm our brains. Just because we can't physically see it doesn't mean it isn't happening.



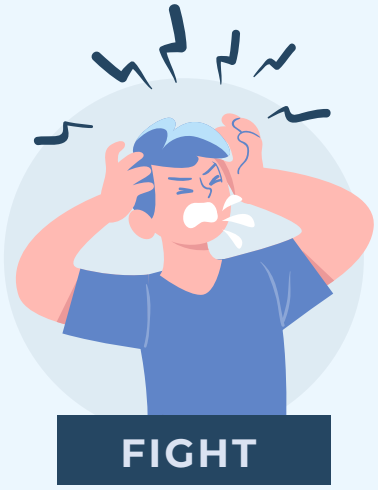
THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF TRAUMA

1) SIMPLE TRAUMA - ONE TIME

A one time event where someone experiences danger. It can be something like a car accident, personal assault, accident, rape, violence, combat, natural disaster or fire.

2) COMPLEX TRAUMA - ALL THE TIME

An ongoing environment of danger where someone never feels safe. They are constantly signalling a stress response such as fight, flight or freeze.



COMMON RESPONSES & SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA

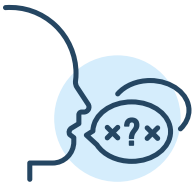
EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	BEHAVIOURAL	THINKING
• Sadness • Anger • Denial • Fear • Shame • Negativity • Emotional outbursts • Feeling critical of yourself or others • Feeling judgemental of yourself or others	• Low energy • Somatic complaints • Nausea • Dizziness • Changes in appetite • Headaches • Altered sleep patterns • Lack of coordination or balance • Paleness	• PTSD • Depression • Anxiety • Self harm • Substance abuse • Not wanting to go to school • Trouble getting out of bed • Trouble completing tasks • Difficulty with relationships • Posting on social media to feel better • Not wanting to hang out with friends	• Nightmares • Trouble concentrating • Feeling insecure about what others are saying • Afraid to speak up • Daydreaming often • Feeling like you are watching your life outside your body • Wanting to escape (video games or TV) • Wanting to feel numb • Afraid that you will be judged • Afraid of what will happen when you get home • Imagining the worst-case scenario • Suicidal thoughts • Thinking no one understands or loves you

Trauma can be caused by things that we **SEE/ HEAR/ EXPERIENCE**

SEE **HEAR** **EXPERIENCE**

These things affect you when you are young, and have an impact on how your brain develops. Think of these negative things like pollution that can affect your sponge (your brain). Your brain needs to be able to constantly filter out the bad things that you see, hear and experience, and be able to retain the positive things you see, hear and experience. When too many bad things happen, the brain begins to change its responses to circumstances.

TRAUMA INVOLVES THINGS LIKE ONGOING:


Verbal Abuse

Sexual Abuse


Physical Abuse

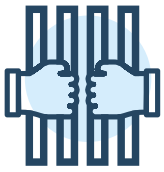

Mental Illness

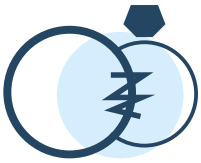

Emotional Neglect


Domestic Violence


Drug and Alcohol Use


Physical Neglect


Parental Incarceration


Parental Separation

These are the more obvious examples of what may cause Complex Trauma, but there are much more subtle, but just as harmful examples:

- Bullying
- Poverty
- Peer rejection or having no friends
- Experience of racism
- Multiple deaths, tragedy or loss
- Community violence (gangs)
- Food scarcity
- Experience of the care system (foster, social services)
- Poor academic performance
- Critical parents
- Unsafe or unstable home environment

Through any experiences, we have to find ways to **LIVE/ COPE/ RELATE**


LIVE


COPE


RELATE

IT'S OKAY TO ASK OR SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED.

FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE

Our brain does everything in its power to protect us from harm and signals a stress response. When the alarm in our brain goes off, we go into **FIGHT/ FLIGHT/ FREEZE.** These responses are NORMAL!

Imagine an incident, event or circumstance where you become very angry and your brain signals "**fight"** : "ATTACK!"

Fight is when your feelings become overwhelming and you feel yourself explode! Breathing speeds up and your heart may beat faster. You may feel a burning feeling on your skin.

Sometimes you may feel like saying bad words, want to kick something, fight without holding back, scream at the top of your lungs, post something mean on social media, throw or break something or do something dangerous.

Imagine a time when you feel pressure or see something very dangerous and your brain sounds the "**flight"** alarm: "RUN!"

Flight is when your feelings get overwhelming and you want to get away! Breathing speeds up and your heart may beat faster. Your body and limbs may get jumpy or tingly.

You may feel like getting out of your skin, talking quickly, running as fast as you can, walking away in the middle of a fight, "ghost" your friends, pretend you feel happy when you are really not. You may stay where you are, but on the inside, you are far away.

Imagine a time when you feel like you can't move or think and your brain sounds the "**freeze"** alarm: "GO NUMB!"

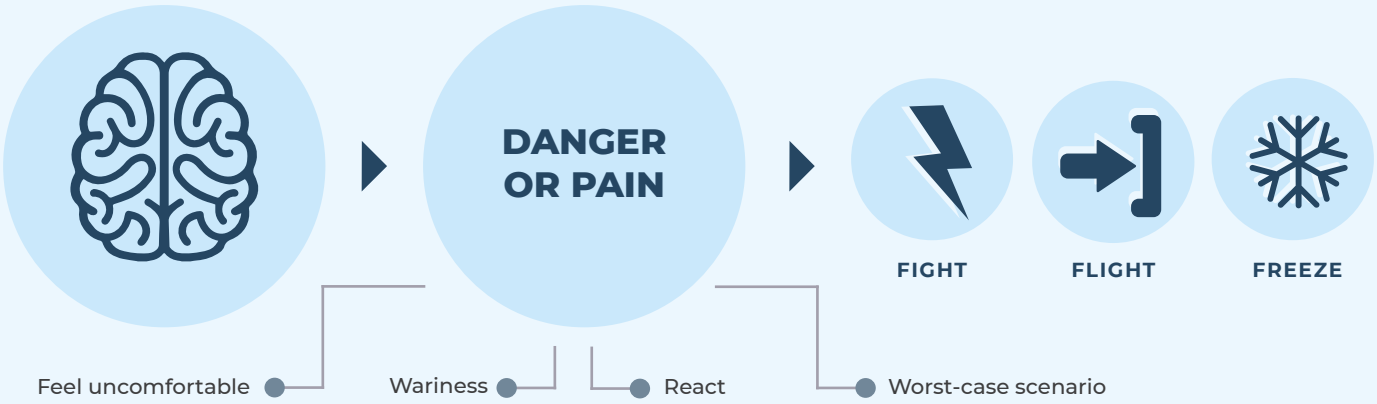
Freeze is when your feelings get overwhelming and you can't attack or run. Breathing speeds up and your heart may beat faster. You stand still, but on the inside, you are doing everything you can to protect yourself.

You may mentally disappear where your head is 'floating', feel invisible, or get stuck where words can't get out. You may distract with games, Netflix, social media, food, sex, alcohol, drugs or keep busy with sports activities or school.

STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Stress produces different chemicals in humans and in animals. We will discuss more in detail at a later date, but today, we will look at an overview of what happens in the brain when it experiences danger or pain.

INITIAL BRAIN CIRCUITS



The problem with this, is if we grow up in adverse environments where there are mostly negative experiences and emotions, we may see danger or pain in nearly all circumstances and react as if things are far worse than they actually are.

We may get triggered into coping with these experiences in particular ways, and as we age, these brain circuits will essentially stay the same. What we don't realize as we become adults, is that this is an unhealthy way to deal with stress because it doesn't actually solve our problems or initial emotions, it just avoides them.

ADULT BRAIN CIRCUITS