

# TRAUMA AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Behavioral cues of Abuse, Neglect, or Mistreatment

Several thin, white, parallel lines of varying lengths and slight curves are positioned on the right side of the slide, extending from the top right towards the bottom left.

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- Parent



# MY TEACHERS: JASON, LEATY, AND DEANNA



*Sock Monkey  
Sock Bag!!!*

BAGS, BASKETS, PINS – KEEP  
INTEGRATED FROM THE BEGINNING.



# LOTS OF CONFUSION!



I CAN'T DO THIS!!!!!!







IT'S NO USE.



# SUMMER!! (AKA: NO SOCK SEASON!)


## PRESENTATION OUTCOMES

- ▶ Describe Trauma
- ▶ Identify examples of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment of people with disabilities.
- ▶ Identify behavioral manifestations of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment in people with communication barriers.
- ▶ Identify how these manifestations can hinder education and goal attainment.
- ▶ Discuss potential mental health results of trauma

- ▶ RESPECT
- ▶ LISTEN

# WHAT IS TRAUMA?

- ▶ a deeply distressing or disturbing experience
- ▶ a psychologically upsetting experience that produces an emotional or mental disorder or otherwise has lasting negative effects on a person's thoughts, feelings, or behavior.



Stop & Think


Do certain smells, sounds, or visuals  
bring up strong emotions of a past  
adverse event?

# EMERGENCY!



# EXAMPLES OF ABUSE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OFTEN ENDURE

- ▶ Stark or blunted environment
- ▶ Exploitation
- ▶ Emotional and Verbal abuse
- ▶ Physical Abuse
- ▶ Punitive Restraints
- ▶ Seclusion

A dark blue, irregular cloud-like shape with a thin black outline, centered on the left side of the slide. The text "Stop & Think" is written inside it in white.

Stop & Think

► What action would you take and would it be helpful?

# OTHER COMMON EXAMPLES OF ABUSE:

- ▶ People are “not allowed” to have a pain flare up
- ▶ Steals or withholds their Social Security Disability check
- ▶ Invalidates the disability
- ▶ Uses the disability to debase or humiliate
- ▶ Agrees but then refuses to help with necessary life tasks
- ▶ Withholds or threatens to withhold medication
- ▶ Instigates sexual activity without consent
- ▶ Withholds, damages or breaks assistive devices
- ▶ Threatens to harm or harms their service animal
- ▶ Uses a disability as an excuse for the abuse

# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ABUSE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

- ▶ Most perpetrators are in a position of authority.
- ▶ Victims have limited vocabulary or expressive skills.
- ▶ Reluctant or hesitant caregivers
- ▶ Passive and compliant
- ▶ Few personal choices

- ▶ The United States Department of Education released a report in 2004 which said "abuse is allowed to continue because even when children report abuse, they are not believed. Because of the power differential, the reputation difference between the educator and the child, or the mindset that children are untruthful, many reports by children are ignored or given minimal attention.....[Schools performed] poor investigations and failed to do their own reporting in terms of violations of district policy of Title IX requirements."

# STATISTICS

# Seven

times more likely to be victimized than any other group.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

70%

Had been victimized.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

63%

Of families reported their loved one had been victimized.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

75%

Of people with mental health conditions were victims of abuse.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

67%

Of people with speech disabilities were victims of abuse.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

67%

Of people with autism were victims of abuse.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

63%

Of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities were  
victims of abuse.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

55%

Of people with mobility disabilities were victims of abuse.

# STATISTIC

Of those  
reporting:

90%

Of victims experienced multiple occasions of abuse.

57%

Were victimized on more than 20 occasions.

# WHAT IF THERE ARE COMMUNICATION BARRIERS?

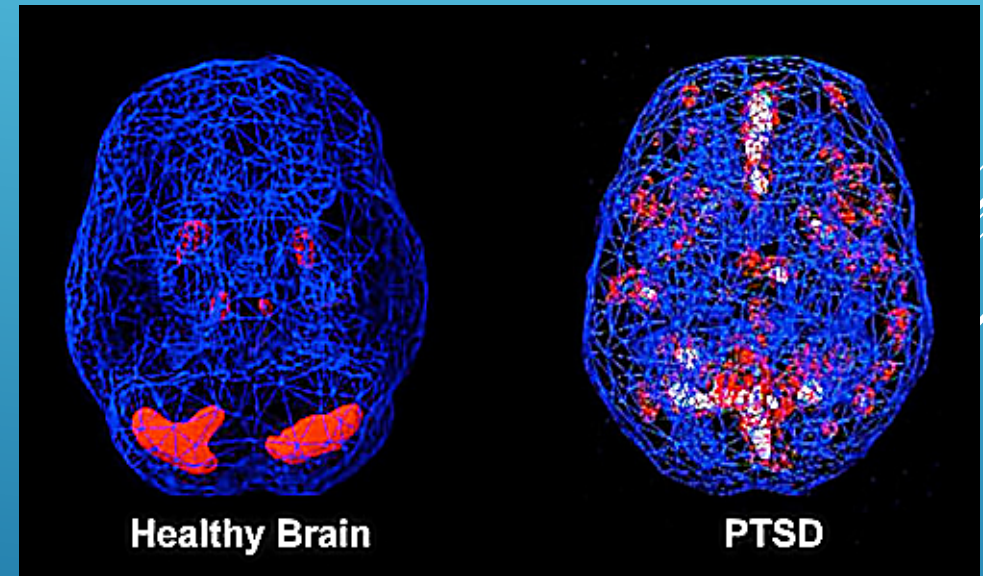
- ▶ Communication barriers limit the victims ability to fully report abuse.
- ▶ Those who do report may not be taken seriously.
- ▶ Communication barriers also limit the victims opportunity to heal.

- ▶ Visible signs and symptoms are dismissed as behavioral problems or traits of the disability.

# WHAT IS HAPPENING DURING A BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATION OF TRAUMA?

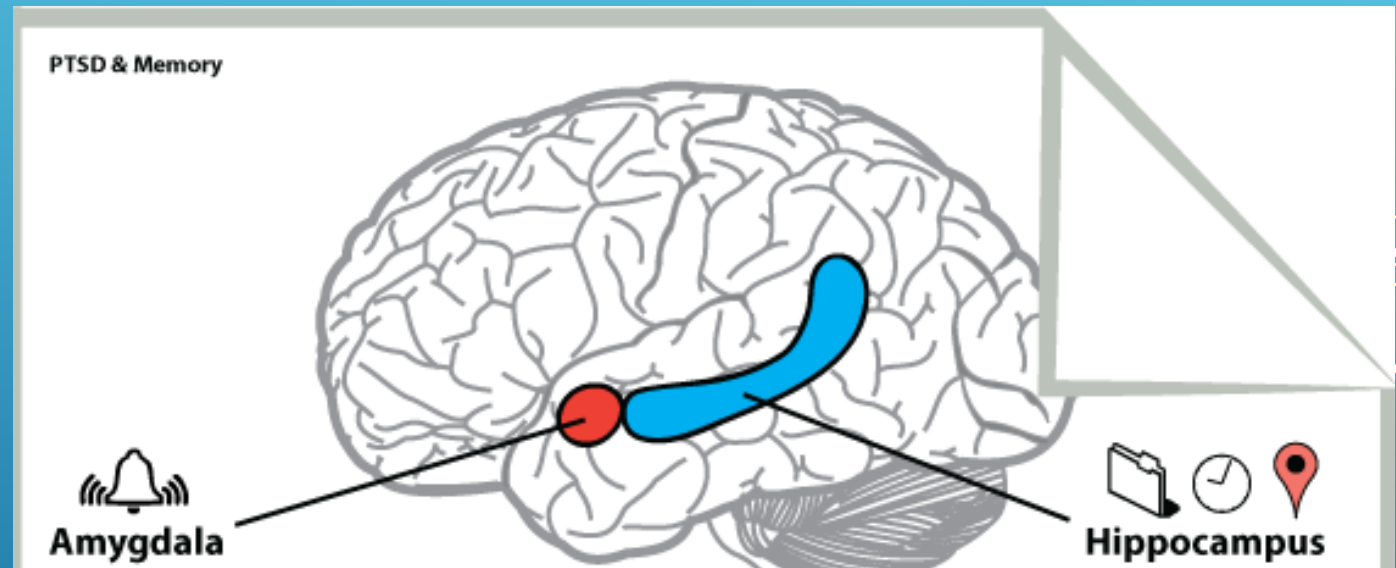
Chemistry is altered When Sympathetic Nervous System Is Triggered:

- ▶ Cortisol goes from Amygdala to Frontal lobe
- ▶ Adrenaline is released and floods the system
- ▶ Regions of brain do not communicate and integrate



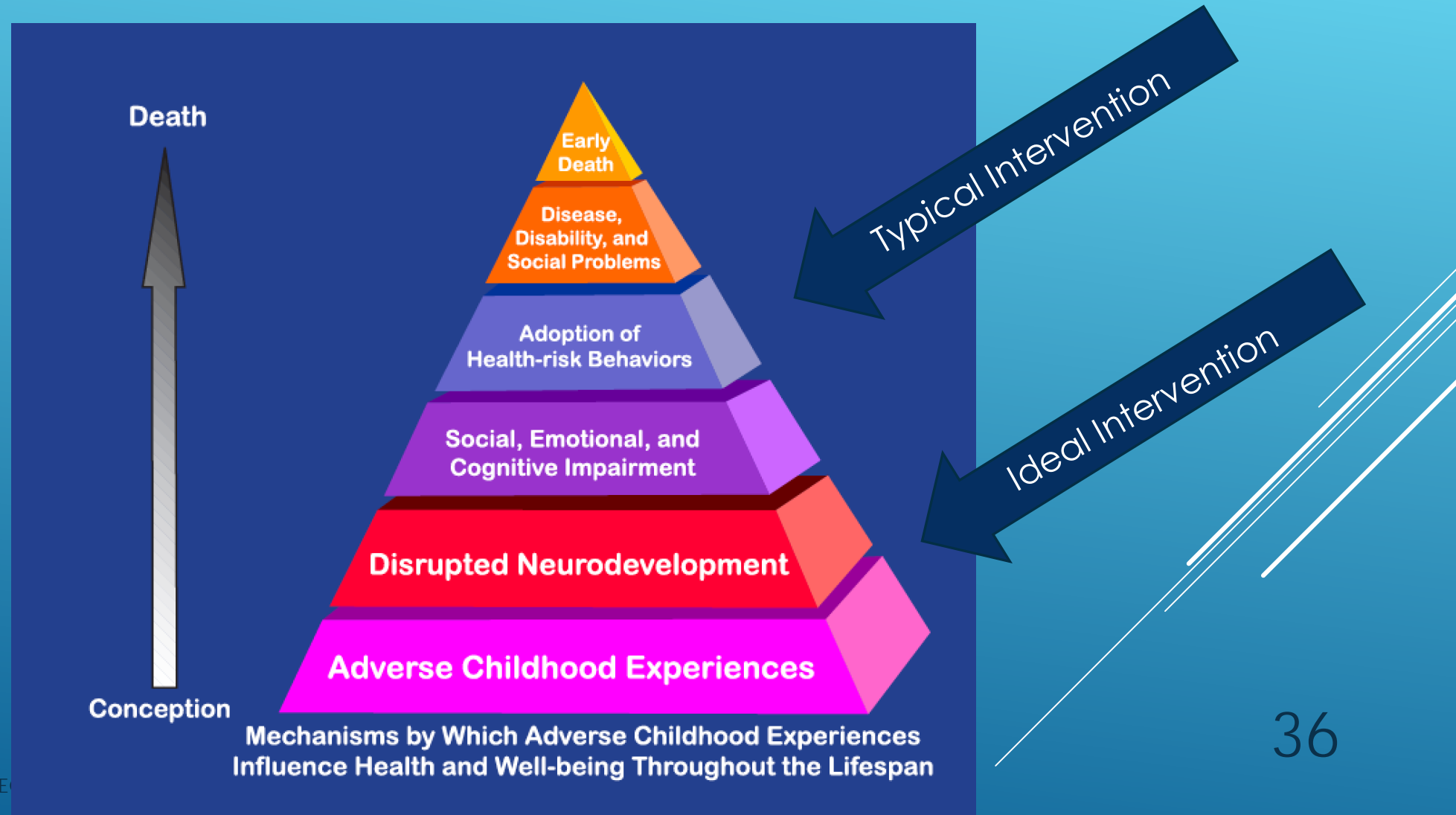
# GOAL ATTAINMENT DECREASES

- ▶ Amygdala grows
- ▶ Hippocampus shrinks.



Psychologytools.org

# THE BEHAVIORAL PYRAMID



# POTENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS

- ▶ Sleep disorders
- ▶ Startle response
- ▶ Numbing
- ▶ Emotional constriction
- ▶ Disrupted sense of safety,
- ▶ Shattered self-image
- ▶ Chronic Stress

# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

- ▶ Psychological distress following exposure to a traumatic or stressful event is quite variable. In some cases, symptoms can be well understood within an anxiety- or fear- based context. It is clear, however, that many individuals who have been exposed to a traumatic or stressful event exhibit a phenotype in which, rather than anxiety... the most prominent clinical characteristics are anhedonic and dysphoric symptoms., variable externalizing angry and aggressive symptoms, or dissociative symptoms.

# FOUR AREAS OF SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

- ▶ Re-experiencing
- ▶ Avoidance
- ▶ Negative Alterations in Cognition and Mood
- ▶ Arousal

# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER PRESENTATION IN PEOPLE WITH ID/DD DISABILITIES

PTSD in People with Intellectual Disabilities	
Looks like:	Actual PTSD Symptom:
A. Agitation /Property Destruction	A. Hyperarousal
B. Obsessive Behavior	B. Hypervigilance
C. Paranoia	C. Mistrust based on abuse experiences
D. Noncompliance	D. Dissociation
E. Aggression	E. Fight response based on triggering of amgydala and sympathetic nervous system
F.“Shut down”	F. Freeze Response
G. Escape Behavior	G. Flight Response
Karyn Harvey, Ph.D.	

# OUTCOMES

- ▶ Lower brain activity measured by EEG
- ▶ Impairments in Executive Functioning
- ▶ Increased Adrenaline levels after 1 year – affects heart, behavior, ability to focus ( looks like ADHD)
- ▶ Often abnormally small physically
- ▶ At higher risk for premature death
- ▶ Healing is possible but spontaneous healing is unlikely.

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Reduce the risk.
- Educate caregivers.
- Believe the victim.
- Improve handling of abuse allegations to improve reporting.
- Hold people accountable.
- Reduce victim burden when utilizing governmental protections.

- ▶ Be proactive- see something say something
- ▶ Communicate a clear, safe, and effective method for parents and students to report suspicions of abuse.
- ▶ Assess for mental health concerns.
- ▶ Treat the mental and emotional health to reduce the need for more restrictive behavioral interventions.
- ▶ Restore supportive classroom environments.

# SECONDARY PREVENTIONS:

- ▶ Modify communication devices.
- ▶ Expand social circles.
- ▶ Unannounced visits to location.
- ▶ Seek treatment when needed.

# OUR RESPONSE TO A VICTIM SHOULD ALWAYS COMMUNICATE:

- ▶ I believe you.
- ▶ It is not your fault.
- ▶ You are not alone.
- ▶ I want to help you.



# SOURCES:

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- ▶ Rowsell, A. C., Clare, I. C. H., & Murphy, G. H. (2013). The Psychological Impact of Abuse on Men and Women with Severe Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 26(4), 257–270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12016>
- ▶ (Reiss, S., Levitan, G., & Szyszko, J. (1982). Emotional disturbance and mental retardation: Diagnostic overshadowing. *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 86, 567–574
- ▶ Hulbert-Williams, L., & Hastings, R. P. (2008). Life events as a risk factor for psychological problems in individuals with intellectual disabilities: A critical review. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 52, 883–895. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2788.2008.01110.x
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- ▶ US Department of Education (2004).
- ▶ <https://www.thehotline.org/is-this-abuse/domestic-violence-disabilities/>

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