

responsibility

## Growing Human(e) Beings

*All Means All*

"With great power, comes great responsibility" - Spiderman



Julie Kurtz  
[www.juliekurtz.com](http://www.juliekurtz.com)

- UNCLE BEN

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Growing Humane(e) Beings

*A Job of Early Childhood Brain Architects*

**Early Childhood Educator's Real Job Description:**

- The brain architect for a child 0-8
- To grow a human to be humane
- To lay a social-emotional foundation
- To provide safety, stability and routine
- To buffer toxic stress
- To learn to heal trauma and build resiliency
- Oh and all that paperwork too with so little time

*"A teacher affects eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops." — Henry Adams.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

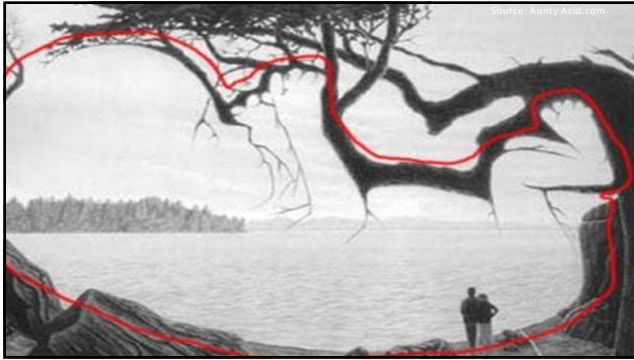
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Growing Humans to Be Humane

(Adapted from Bruce Perry)

- Humans become humane from being cared for, shared with, listened to, valued and nurtured by adult caregivers.
- Humane caregiving helps children express their capacity to be humane.
- The most important thing is social-emotional literacy



---

---

---

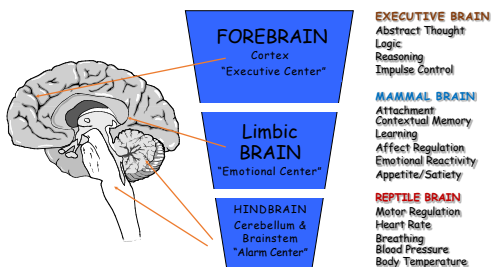
---

---

---

---

### Hierarchy of Brain Development



---

---

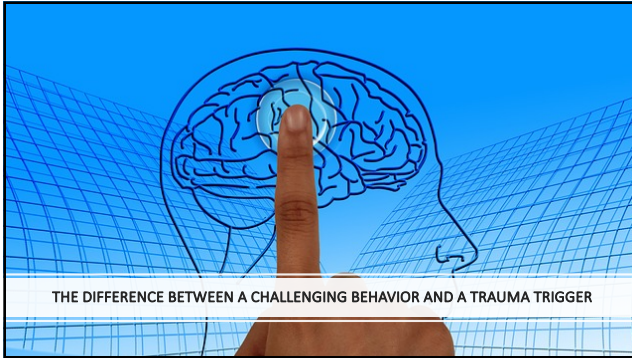
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Superpowers vs. Kryptonite

- It is easy to be a superhero when the easy children make it come so naturally for us. What about the challenging behavior or children with trauma triggers? How do we feel with them?
- How do we change our perspective from what is wrong with you to how can I understand **THE MEANING BEHIND THE BEHAVIOR:**
  - Gain someone or something
  - Avoid someone or something
  - Express an emotion
  - Trauma reminder/trigger: I feel unsafe and scared and need to protect myself

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Take time to see the child behind the behavior.

*Their behavior is communicating a need.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Young children who experience trauma see the world as a dangerous place and their ***stress response systems are continually activated***, communicating to them that they are not safe.

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children **Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz**




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Signs a Child is in the Reptile Brain (Fight, Flight or Freeze)

- Hurting others
- Hurting themselves
- Destroying property
- Yelling and screaming
- Swearing
- Crying or tantrums
- Threatening
- Bullying
- Shut down or dissociative (out of it or in another world)
- The child appears frozen or without words
- The child is running away
- The child is hiding, avoiding, or escaping a situation
- Can't listen to instructions, guidance or words
- Is not responsive to redirection

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children **Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Things to do or say when in Reptile Brain

- Be still with the child using minimal words and just be present, letting them "borrow" your calm state
- Send a gentle message, "you are safe, you are here with me now"
- Walk or sit with the child
- Match the level (*if they are sitting see if they can tolerate you sitting with them, if they are needing to walk see if you can walk with them, if they are shutdown, tell them you see them and will be nearby when they are ready*). It depends on how the child will tolerate you in their space—will it be comforting or dysregulating? Make sure not to send a message of abandonment (*example would be just walking away and leaving them there with no words*)
- Ask if they want to walk with you over to the safe space or calming zone in the room

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children **Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### Things to Do or Say When in Reptile Brain

- Use a calm, neutral voice
- Use few words of direction and correction
- Don't problem solve as their cortex is not accessible at this time
- Let the child know you are here when they are ready
- Get down to their level to appear less threatening or intimidating
- Don't ignore the child
- Don't say the child is "just trying to get attention"
- Don't use stern tones and quick abrasive movements
- Find a safe space they can go that is more regulating in the environment

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Signs a Child is in the Emotional/Mammal Brain

- Emotions are escalated (anger, sadness, frustration)
- The child is telling you what happened to them with intensity and their own perspective
- The child is telling you what happened through nonverbal means such as drawing, writing, art
- The child can still be in both reptile and emotional brain at the same time so you may see some of both areas
- The child's stories do not include empathy to others, perspective taking, or solutions
- The child has a story filled with how they were wronged and the other is wrong
- Stories can have elements of exaggeration "I will die or I will hurt them"
- If they share solutions they are often exaggerated and may not be logical
- The child is crying or yelling or shutting down while talking
- The child may or may not be able to express their emotions with words depending on the level of emotional intensity

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Things to Do or Say When in Mammal Brain

- Use a calm and neutral voice.
- Use body language that conveys safety (allow children to borrow your calm energy until they regulate)
- Help them feel safe
- Help them feel that you care for them and what they experienced
- Help the child name what they are sensing in their bodies
- Help the child name what they are feeling with words
- Don't guide to solution when emotions are intense
- Help the child tell their story without agreeing or disagreeing and without correction or direction
- Use sensory objects in the classroom to manage energy (sand, water, music, pinwheels, safe space, bubbles, coloring, play dough, walking, etc.)
- Both the mammal and reptile brain are often called the "downstairs brain" and dance together with the intensity of Fight, Flight, and Freeze

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Things to Do or Say When in Mammal Brain

- Use words that de-escalate or are neutral such as "that happened to you," "how did that feel," "you must have felt X," "I wonder if." These words help them tell their story
- Attune to the internal experience and story of the child to calm their dysregulation
- Use calming areas or activities that will support optimal regulation (healthy ways to calm energy (listening to music, sensory objects such as art, stress balls, fidgets), or expel energy (walking, running, movement)
- Acknowledge their feelings, don't try to make them go away or minimize what they are feeling (that is silly, you are so dramatic, that did not happen)
- Don't call the child out. Create a sense of privacy for their story
- Offer a break (water, walk, calming area)

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Signs a Child is in Optimal Regulation (CEO/Boss Brain)

- The child is not hurting self, others, or property
- The child is responsive to your words
- The child's body appears calm and back in the present moment
- The child is able to perspective take
- The child is more logical and open to thinking of solutions
- The child is open to ideas or suggestions
- The child can think of choices
- The child has the capacity to see or hear the other sides of a problem
- The child is open to talking things through with adult or peers
- The child tells their story with words

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Things to do or say when child has access to the CEO/Boss brain

- Analyzing different solutions to a problem
- Logical reasoning
- Perspective taking
- Empathy taking
- Listening
- Following instructions
- Reminder of expectations and rules
- Re-engaging in activities

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**When a child is “triggered”, the learning and executive brain shuts down and the reptile and emotional brain kicks in full gear...**



19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**It's Easier To Build The Brain Of A Young Child, Than Repair The Brain Of An Adult But...**



20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Key Strategies for building resilience and healing toxic stress**



- Relationships
- Environment
- Building and Strengthening Sensory and Emotional Literacy
- Managing Big Emotions/Self-Regulation

21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Relationship's

### 4 S's of Attuning to a Child

- Seen** – Caregiver senses the child's internal mental state
- Soothed** – Child has distress and caregiver tunes in and helps state to calm state (reactive to receptive)
- Safe** – Caregiver protects child from danger and will not be a source of danger
- Secure** – Develops a coherent sense of self. Learn implicitly that when things don't go so well they will get worked out.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ATTUNEMENT AND CONNECTION

*"For a child or an adult, it's extremely powerful to hear someone say, 'I get you. I understand. I see why you feel this way.' This kind of empathy disarms us. It relaxes our rigidity. It soothes our chaos"*

(Siegel & Bryson, 2012)




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Creating Safe and Predictable Environments

- **Daily routines and predictable schedule.**
- **Reduce the number of transitions.**
- **Create rituals for transitions.**
- **Reduce the number of unexpected guests and changes in schedules.**
- **Use visual schedules and visuals to support the child.**




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Helping a Child with a Trauma Reminder/Trigger in the Moment

"Maybe you remember a time when going to sleep was scary for you. Now you are here with Ms. Julie and I am taking care of you. You are safe at preschool. I will stay with you until you fall asleep. When you wake up, I will be here and your friends will be here. After nap, we will have snack together. You are safe. My job is to keep you safe at preschool."

25

---

---

---

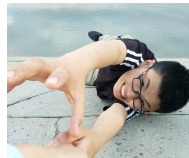
---

---

---

---

---



Children look for spaces, objects or a person to feel safe again and help them feel regulated.

26

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



When teachers ask a child to explain why she or he did something, we often hear only crickets. On our good days, we sense kids truly have no idea. On our bad days, we think they are intentionally not telling us. On our very worst days, we assume they got up in the morning with the intent to ruin our carefully constructed life.

When teachers ask a child to explain why she or he did something, we often hear only crickets. On our good days, we sense kids truly have no idea. On our bad days, we think they are intentionally not telling us. On our very worst days, we assume they got up in the morning with the intent to ruin our carefully constructed life.

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

---



### Why Promote Sensory Awareness?

- Helps children find ways to communicate without words how they feel and what they are experiencing
- Trauma histories store memories in sensations, not words
- When triggered, a child cannot access words so communicating in other ways is the first point of entry for regulation

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

My heart feels Jumpy like a Frog  
 My head feels Frozen and my body feels Cold My heart is beating Fast like a Race Car  
 My tummy feels like a Roller Coaster My head feels like Buzzing Bees  
 My insides are Twisty  
 My legs feel like heavy Rocks  
 My insides are Empty  
 I feel Cold all over  
 My heart is Heavy  
 I feel like a Volcano ready to explode  
 My brain feels like a Rocket Ship ready to take off My fists are Tight  
 My face feels Hot and Sweaty  
 My whole body feels Loose  
 I have Scratchy skin  
 My legs and arms are Shaky  
 My body feels like an Iceberg  
 My tummy is a T-rex Dinosaur My mouth is like a Cotton Ball  
 My head feels like a Roller Coaster

Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children  
 Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

### Teaching Children to Describe the Sensations in Their Bodies



Sensory Bin Created by Lakshmi Padmanabhan from DeAnza Child Development Center

---

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

### Listen to your body

Pay attention to:

your breath

the temperature of your skin



your heartbeat

your muscles and belly

How do you experience the energy in your body?  
 What other sensations do you notice?

Copyright © 2016 DeAnza

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Just Breathe!



- **Breathing** is your bodies **key to unlock the part of the brain responsible for self-regulation.**
- Out breath stimulates the PNS or the brakes of our body to slow us down.
- In breath stimulates the SNS or the accelerator of our body to speed and amp us up.
- You can teach children to calm their activated and dysregulated sensory system using their breath.

31

---

---

---

---

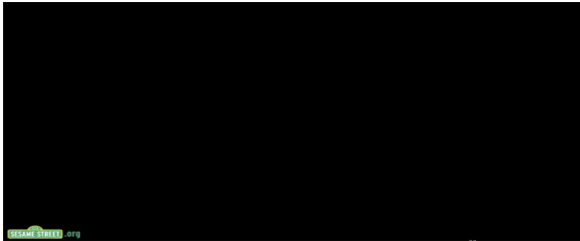
---

---

---

---

## Just Breathe Video (Elmo from Sesame Street)



32

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Teaching to Breathe

- Calming Jars
- Breathing Stars
- Feathers are a great visual for children
- Stuffed Animals or Breathing Buddy
- Pretend Balloon Breaths – "Breathe in, and breathe out"
- Smell the flower and blow out the candle
- Breathing Apps

33

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



If we carry  
intergenerational  
trauma (and we do),  
then we also carry  
*intergenerational wisdom.*  
It's in our genes and in  
our DNA.

KAZU HAGA

## Resources Continued

### Books

- Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz: *Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children*
- Dr. Daniel Siegel: *Whole Brain Child* and *Parenting from the Inside Out*
- Leslie Koplow: *Unsmiling Faces: How Preschools can Heal*
- Dr. Peter Levine and Maggie Kline: *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes*
- Barbara Sorrels (2015). *Reaching and teaching children exposed to trauma*

### Websites:

- <http://www.abaparenting.com>
- [www.ace-network.com/cfs/spotlight.htm](http://www.ace-network.com/cfs/spotlight.htm)
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/five-numbers-to-remember-about-early-childhood-development/>
- [www.cacsefel.com](http://www.cacsefel.com)

35



— COMMISSIONER JAMES GORDON

Julie Kurtz, LMFT  
[www.juliekurtz.com](http://www.juliekurtz.com)  
[juliekurtzconsulting@gmail.com](mailto:juliekurtzconsulting@gmail.com)

WWW.JULIEKURTZ.COM

Author of the book: Trauma Informed  
Practices for Early Childhood Educators

