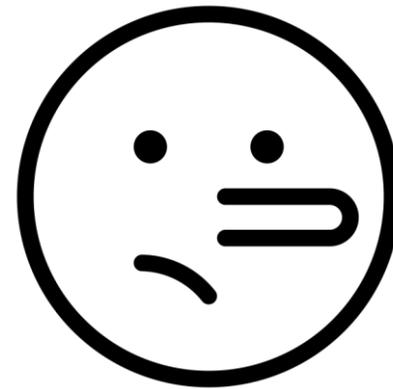
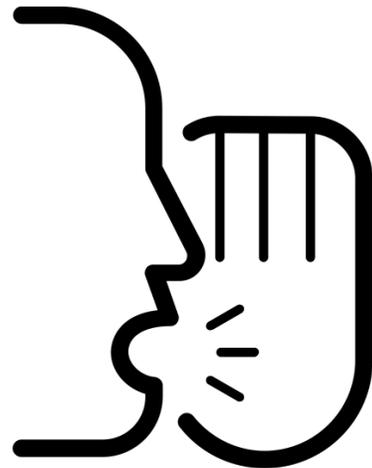
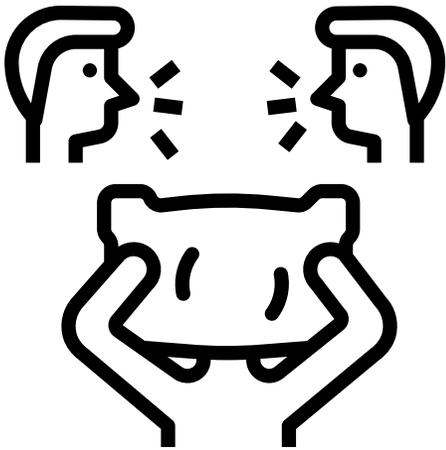


# Trauma Informed Parenting

Leslie Hampson, LMSW  
Social Worker  
Pre and Post Adoption  
Services

## Reflect On:

- ▶ A behavior that got you in trouble as a kid
- ▶ A child's behavior that irks you the most



# A Framework for Understanding Discipline

- Behavior is how a child communicates
- Discipline is how adoptive parents help children who have experienced loss and trauma to manage their behaviors
- Adopted children may need to learn:
  - How to express their feelings with behaviors that are healthy and acceptable to society and your family
  - How to get along with other children or adults
  - How to get attention in positive ways
  - How to be a part of a family

# Trauma Teaches the Child that:



- ▶ The world is scary and not safe
- ▶ I am invisible/ I don't count
- ▶ My needs don't get met, my feelings don't matter
- ▶ Others don't matter
- ▶ Adults are not helpful
- ▶ Others are competition
- ▶ If I don't get what I need for myself I won't survive
- ▶ There isn't a connection between their feelings and behaviors

# What Does This Mean for Family Life?

## Children may struggle with:

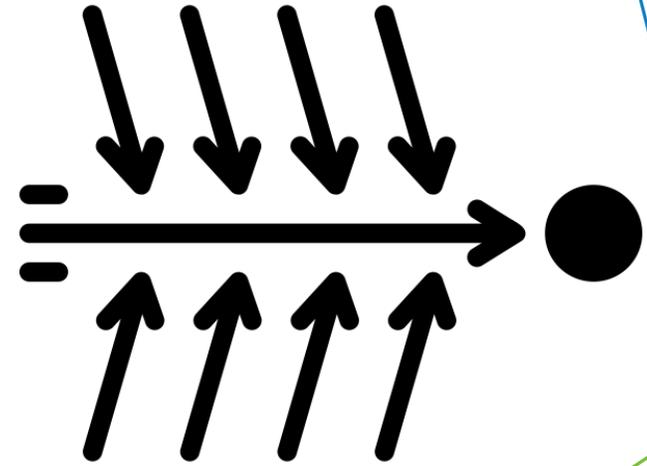
- ▶ Trust
- ▶ Relational boundaries
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Attuning to other's emotional states
- ▶ Learning / homework assignments
- ▶ Speech and language
- ▶ Transitions
- ▶ Problem solving

## Parents may struggle with:

- ▶ Admitting that their child is a trigger
- ▶ Relational boundaries
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Mismatch between expectations and reality
- ▶ The timeframe in which challenging behaviors persist
- ▶ Managing loss

# What Influences Parenting Decisions

- ▶ Parents' relationships with their caregivers as children
- ▶ How parents were disciplined as children
- ▶ Parent, friend, and family opinions
- ▶ Parents' cultural values
- ▶ Societal norms
- ▶ Parents' personalities
- ▶ Parents' experiences of their child's temperament
- ▶ Child's age and developmental stage



Physical punishment is  
uniquely harmful for  
the child who has  
experienced trauma  
and loss



How will you explain your child's behavior?  
Your explanation will guide your interventions.

'He just wants his own way- he can't hear no'

'She's manipulating us'

"He just wants attention"

'She does just fine when she wants to'

'violent 'resistant', 'out of control', 'defiant'

He doesn't have any feelings/ doesn't care about others

# Your Mindset Matters

- ▶ Compassion, respect, and empathy for your child's learned survival and coping mechanisms
- ▶ You are your child's ally, you are a team
- ▶ Effective mix of nurturing and structure
  - ▶ Your child needs to feel safe and trust you enough to release control and try new behaviors
- ▶ Connecting before correcting
  - ▶ Connecting means close, warm, interactive, playful



# Helping the Child Understand Their Feelings



**Anger, rejection, hurt, anxiety, guilt, hopelessness are common**

Can be expressed in difficult or destructive behaviors

Help children “talk out” instead of “act out” painful feelings

Give children words to name and own their feelings



**Listen and validate their feelings to build self-esteem**

They think their emotions aren’t worthy of being heard



**Be a good communicator / be a role model**

Give clear messages  
Listen well (use eye contact, body language)  
Use tone of voice well

# The IDEAL Response



Immediate

Within 3 seconds of the incident



Direct

Address the child before the behavior

Within 3 feet of the child



Efficient

Four levels of response  
Offer two choices

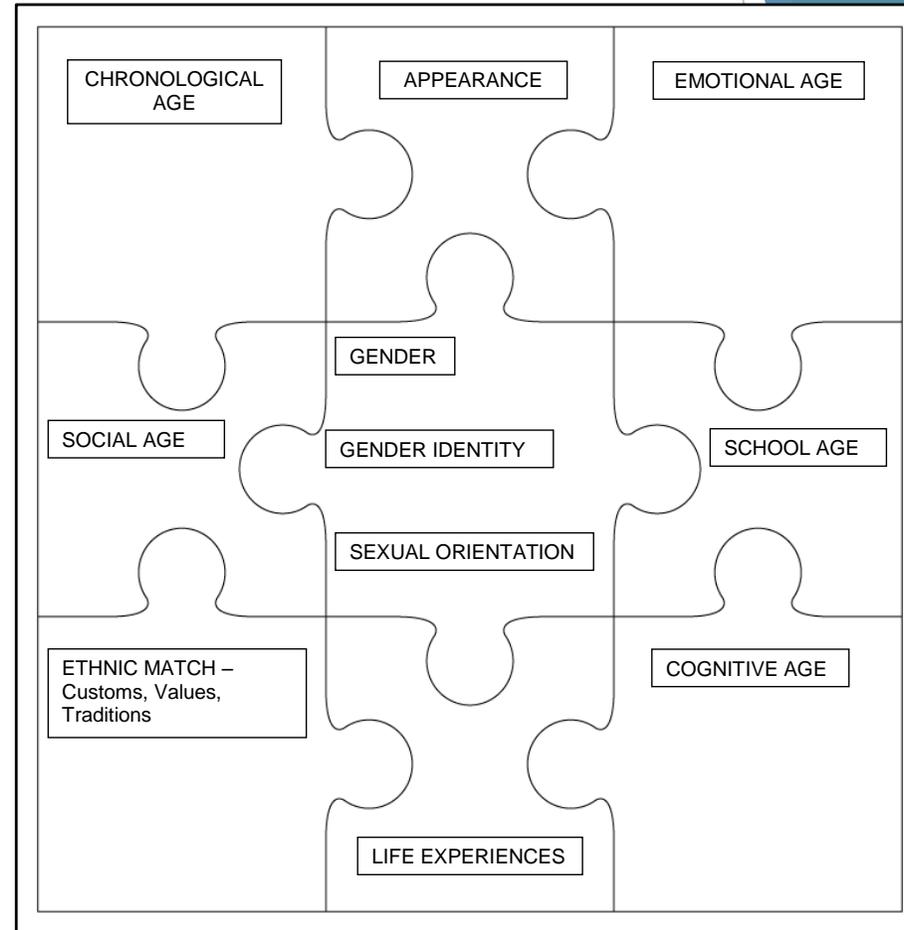


Action-based

They are in survival mode  
Allow for a do-over



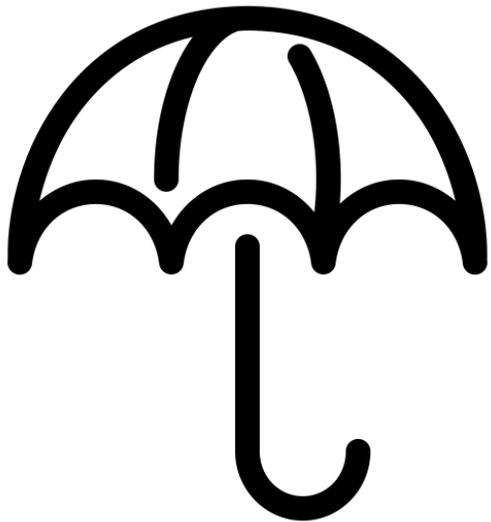
Leveled at the behavior (NOT at the child)



From CWLA's Pride Model training

# Matching development with Behavior Management techniques

## Creating Felt Safety with PACE



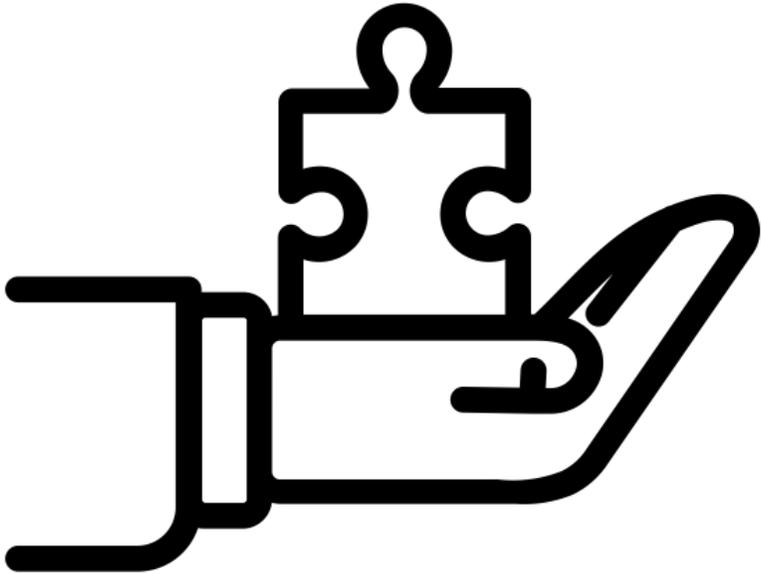
- ▶ Felt safety -> trust -> healing and learning
- ▶ Be consistent, warm, and responsive
- ▶ PACE
  - ▶ Playful
  - ▶ Accepting
  - ▶ Curious
  - ▶ Empathetic

# Playfulness



- ▶ An open, ready, calm, relaxed, and engaged attitude
- ▶ Use a “reading a story” tone, avoid a lecturing tone
  - ▶ Laughing and giggling = less defensive and more reflective
- ▶ Doesn’t mean being funny all the time, but creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest
- ▶ Can diffuse a difficult or tense situation

# Acceptance



- ▶ Unconditionally accepting a child makes them feel secure, safe, and loved
- ▶ Does NOT mean you accept bad behavior
  - ▶ Accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, and motives behind the behavior
  - ▶ Can still be firm in limiting behavior
- ▶ Their inner life is not right or wrong, it is

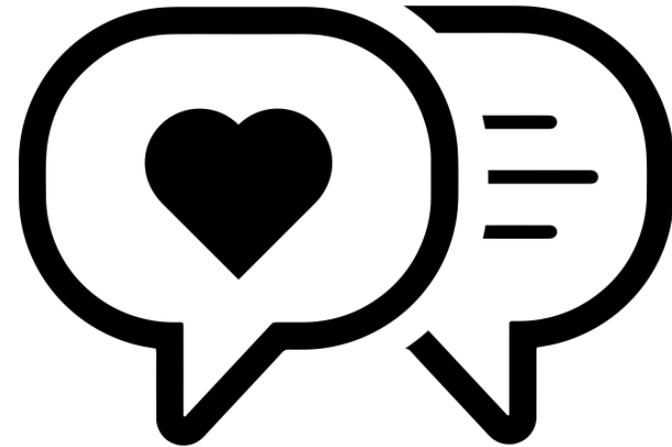
# Curiosity

- ▶ Without judgment, children become aware of their inner life
- ▶ Quiet, accepting tone helps your child feel heard and understood
- ▶ Wondering about the meaning behind the behavior
- ▶ “What do you think was going on?” or “I wonder what...” instead of “Why did you do that?”
  - ▶ Said without expecting a response from the child
- ▶ Encourages the child to share more



# Empathy

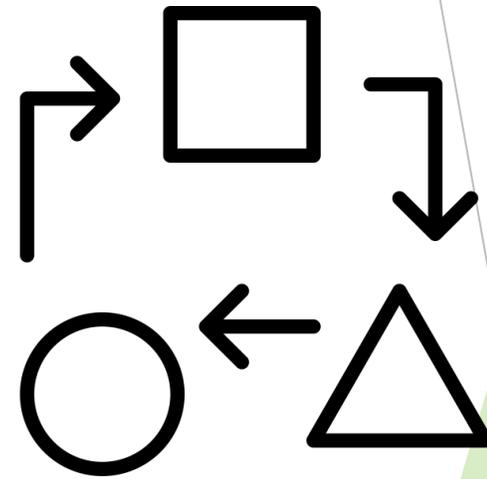
- ▶ A sense of compassion for the child and their feelings
- ▶ Stay with the child emotionally, providing comfort and support
- ▶ Communicates love and commitment
- ▶ The child's distress is not "too much" for the parent - together they will get through it
  - ▶ You are your child's ally



# The Importance of Repairing Your Mistakes (Karyn Purvis)

# Transitions

- ▶ Transitions are often hard for children with trauma histories
  - ▶ Fear of change, loss of control, and unknown
  - ▶ “Mini” losses
- ▶ How you can help
  - ▶ Make their day predictable, establish routines
  - ▶ Make a schedule (use pictures if no language)
  - ▶ Let them know what’s coming next (ex: in five minutes...)
  - ▶ Explain your absences
  - ▶ Manage holidays and school breaks

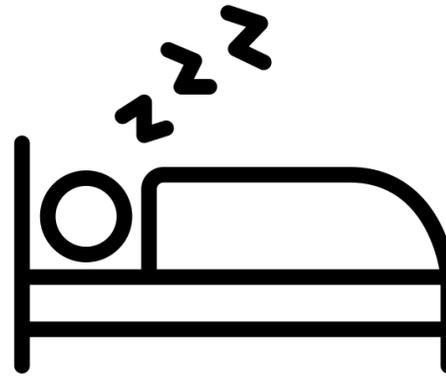


# Food - Hoarding, Avoidance



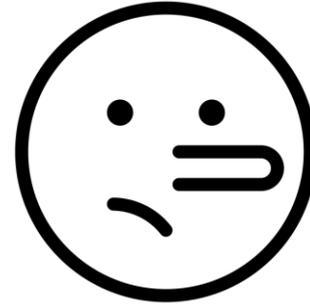
- ▶ NEVER withhold food, particularly early on
    - ▶ Avoid using food as a reward or punishment
  - ▶ Routine is important
    - ▶ Have predictable meal and snack times
  - ▶ Food here will taste and smell different
    - ▶ Incorporate previous foods and snacks as much as possible
  - ▶ They may not know what “hungry” or “full” feel like
- ▶ High cortisol levels can lead to high drive for sugar intake
  - ▶ May need to feel in control, particularly when their food needs were not met
    - ▶ Provide a snack bin accessible to the child to give “permission” and control
    - ▶ Snack in their pocket or backpack
  - ▶ Provide choices but not too many
  - ▶ Tends to subside with time once they can trust you to meet their needs

# Sleep



- ▶ Cultural practices (i.e. cosleeping)
- ▶ Environmental differences (noise, lights, other people around)
- ▶ Time that was “safe” to wander around in the orphanage
- ▶ Too much sleep is also concerning
- ▶ Bedtime routine (may not match child’s chronological age)
- ▶ Can bring up thoughts of trauma - when trying to fall asleep or waking up with nightmares
  - ▶ Mindfulness and Meditation
- ▶ Can be linked with hunger and access to food

# Lying



- ▶ Understand the context - safety issue vs. hiding vs. embellishing
- ▶ Be careful of your own feelings of justice
- ▶ What are they gaining from the behavior?
  - ▶ Avoiding rejection and shame? Creating control? Believe they are “bad” and acting to reinforce? Started out small and can’t stop? Recreating a familiar environment? Cognitively confused? Lack of cause and effect thinking?
- ▶ May have been adaptive in their previous environment
  - ▶ A way to have control in an environment without control
- ▶ Don’t set your child up for failure
  - ▶ Don’t ask if they lied, don’t ask if they stole something if you know they did
  - ▶ Normalize it - “this may have worked well in the past but now that you are a part of a family we are asking you to change and that is hard”
- ▶ Respond with love, acceptance, and clear boundaries about unacceptable behavior - “in this family, we tell the truth”
- ▶ Give opportunity for a do-over and offer other way they could have handled it
  - ▶ Make a big deal of truth-telling

# Rejection and Attachment Difficulties

- ▶ The child may be feeling shame and/or recreating a familiar environment
- ▶ Adults may have been untrustworthy and/or scary in the past
- ▶ The importance of nurture and play
- ▶ When one parent attaches more than the other
- ▶ Important (and difficult!) to respond non-emotionally
  - ▶ “It must be really hard to feel that you hate your mom/dad”
  - ▶ “I can see you miss [home country, connections] very much. Do you want to...” (offer nurture, way to connect with country/connections)
  - ▶ “I wonder how that feels to think that I might hate you? That must be really scary.”
- ▶ Indiscriminate affection

## Dysregulation

- ▶ The inability to control yourself or your emotions
- ▶ Is a byproduct of trauma
- ▶ Child has chronically high levels of cortisol
- ▶ No one soothed them, which teaches them to self-regulate and self-soothe
- ▶ The child is responding out of fear and discussions about consequences for their behavior will not be fruitful

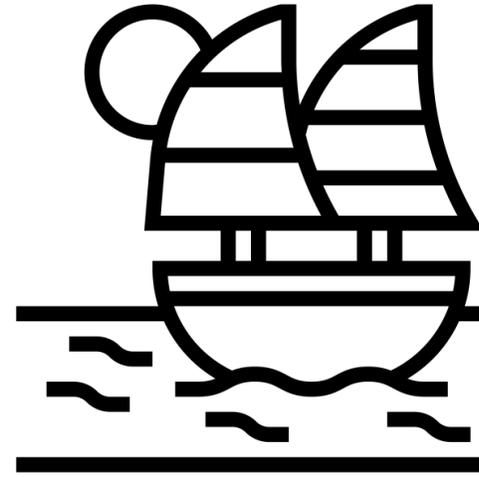


# Dysregulation and Acting Out

- ▶ Your child is responding out of fear and discussions about consequences for their behavior will not be fruitful
  - ▶ Respond empathically, naming their feelings
  - ▶ “Matching the affect”
- ▶ Aggression
  - ▶ Fight vs. flight; Allow for an escape route
  - ▶ De-escalation techniques and training
- ▶ Sexualized behaviors
- ▶ Separate behavior from the worth of the child

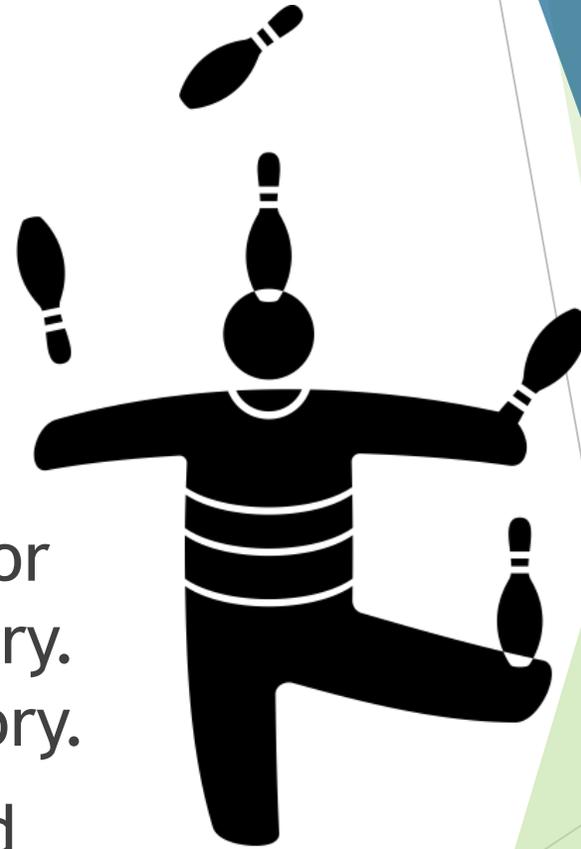
# Helping the Child Relax

- ▶ In the moment
  - ▶ Encourage deep slow breaths (Belly Breathing, Rainbow Breathing)
  - ▶ Sing a rhythmic song (e.g. Row Row Row Your Boat)
  - ▶ Speak softly and warmly
  - ▶ Get down to their level (kneel, sit)
  - ▶ Offer a stress ball or a fidget toy
  - ▶ Offer a sweet sucking candy or lollipop
  - ▶ Offer to sit or stand farther from them
- ▶ Develop self-regulation practices
  - ▶ Be aware of sensory processing needs
  - ▶ Rhythmic exercise (dancing, yoga, swimming, running)
  - ▶ Meditation and mindfulness
  - ▶ Needlecrafts
  - ▶ Play!



# Managing Expectations

- ▶ Every behavior a child exhibits is telling their caregiver how they feel about themselves, their caregiver, their home environment and their community.
- ▶ Change takes time.
- ▶ The child is not the behavior. The behavior is the story of their trauma and loss history. It takes time to change their behavior story.
- ▶ It's hard to use PACE when you're drained and exhausted. Use supports, find ways to build your capacity, and take an adult "time out."



# Circle of Security



## Resource List

- The Connected Child - Purvis
- Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children - Hughes
- Parenting the Hurt Child- Keck and Kupecky
- Parenting from the Inside Out - Siegel and Hartzell
- PPS Department at Spence-Chapin (Parent coaching, family & child therapy)

**THANK YOU** for joining me today!

**Lhampson@Spence-Chapin.org**