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Spring 2023

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# Trauma-Informed Care Professional Development for K-12 Educators from an Occupational Therapy Perspective

Sarah Farrance, OTD/S, Kristy Yurichak, MOT, OTR/L, Edie Hardin-Steiner, MT-BC, Barbara Milliken, Ed.D, OTR/L, CVW

## Background

K-12 educators should receive trauma-informed professional development because most of their students will have experienced trauma or will experience a traumatic event in the future. By the age of 16, more than 66% of children have reported that they have experienced at least one traumatic event (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.). Peterson (2018) defines a traumatic event as a frightening, dangerous, or violent event threatening a child's life or physical well-being.

### Population:

Alternative K-12 school in Akron serving children with social, emotional and behavioral needs and high Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores (prior to COVID-19) in the least restrictive environment.

### Aim of Study:

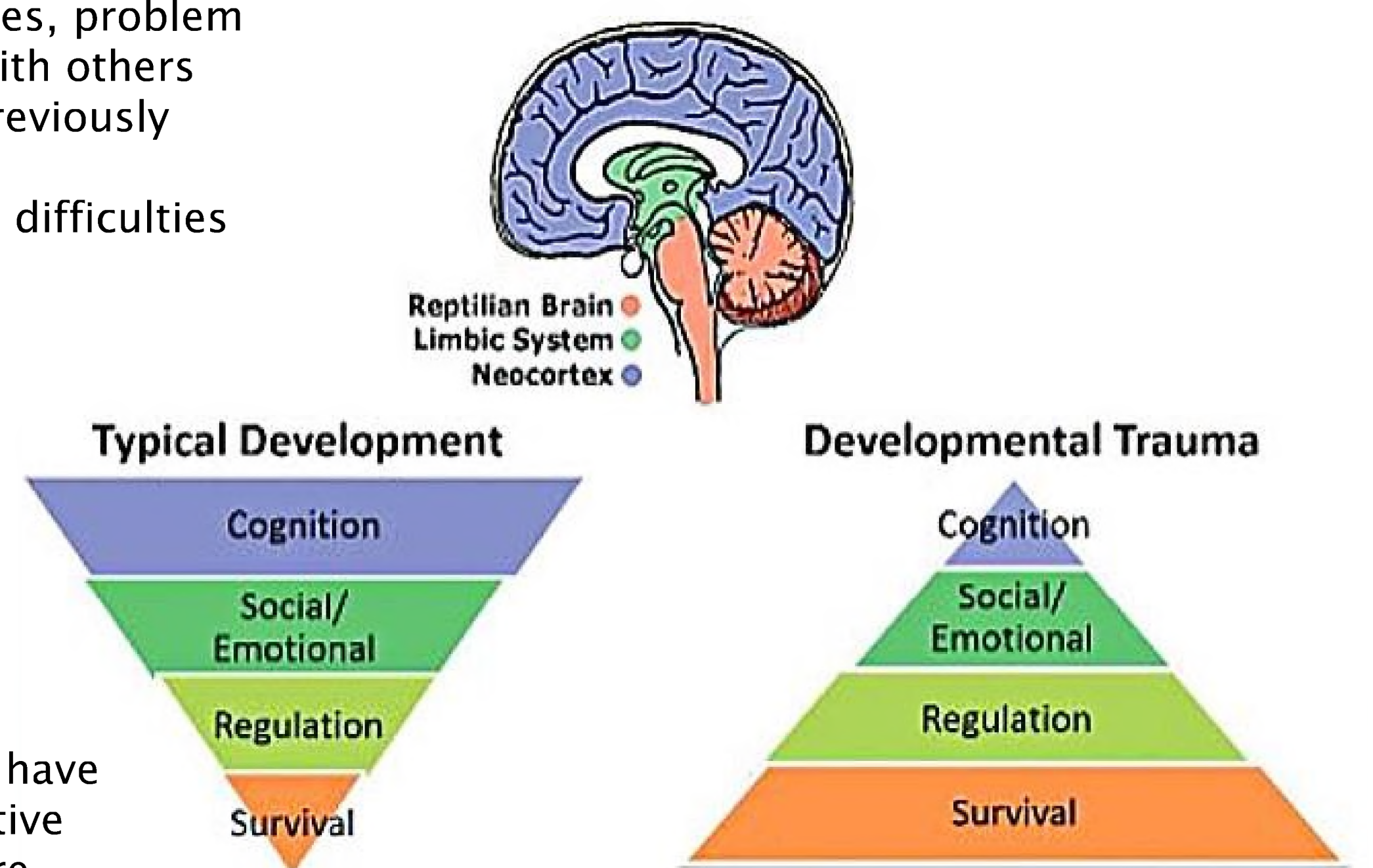
To understand how to meet the needs of students who have histories of trauma and better serve educators that work with this population of students.

Being exposed to the stress caused by traumatic events can cause children to develop:

- Intense, ongoing emotional upset and behavior changes
- Anxiety and depressive symptoms
- behavioral changes
- Difficulties with self-regulation
- Inter-relational difficulties, problem
- Forming attachments with others
- Regression or loss of previously acquired skills
- Attention and academic difficulties (Peterson, 2018)

Children who experience trauma have several obstacles in the way of learning:

- Difficulties concentrating and sitting still
- Poor memory
- Difficulty with reading
- Increased number of days absent
- Academic difficulty and lower GPA (Ohio Department of Education, 2022)



Children who experience traumatic experiences can have trouble attending to cognitive tasks. Their brains are more preoccupied in establishing and maintaining their survival.

Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

## Capstone Activities

### Capstone Activities:

- Implemented the Comfortable Cafeteria and Refreshing Recess programs during lunch and recess in three classrooms, 3 days weekly
- Researched and wrote trauma-informed care professional development (a handbook and online modules)
- Recorded daily notes on the trauma-informed practices being implemented around the school and how students respond to these practices
- Helped to facilitate a variety of groups for students alongside capstone site supervisors and school staff

### Capstone Impact:

- Established rapport and relationships with students
- Developed an ability to engage students who have histories of trauma in therapeutic activity
- Established that the Every Moment Counts mental health promotion initiative can be applied and adapted to students who have histories of trauma
- Experiences gathered throughout capstone experience helped to inform the content of professional development handbook and online modules

### Major Accomplishments:

- Wrote a trauma-informed care professional development handbook for K-12 educators
- Created associated online modules for chapters within the professional development handbook
- Planned, adapted, and implemented 6 weeks of the Comfortable Cafeteria and Refreshing Recess programs, part of the Every Moment Counts mental health promotion initiative in a kindergarten, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom with students who have significant emotional and behavioral needs
- Planned, adapted, and implemented 3 additional weeks of the Comfortable Cafeteria and Refreshing Recess programs with content focused on trauma-informed care and social emotional learning
- Provided Calm Moment Card resources, a program that is part of the Every Moment Counts mental health promotion initiative, to educators
- Adapted Calm Moment Card resources to be utilized as a quick resource for situations that require emergent attention

## Brain States and Learning



### Survival State

#### BRAIN STEM

Survival State represents the base level of Brain State, and asks the question, "Am I safe?" The only way to sooth the Survival State is through the creation of Safety.

### Emotional State

#### LIMBIC SYSTEM

This Brain State represents mid-level functionality and asks the question, "Am I loved?" The only way to sooth an upset emotional state is through Connection.

### Executive State

#### PREFRONTAL LOBES

The Executive State represents the optimal state for problem-solving and learning. This Brain State asks the question, "What can I learn from this?"

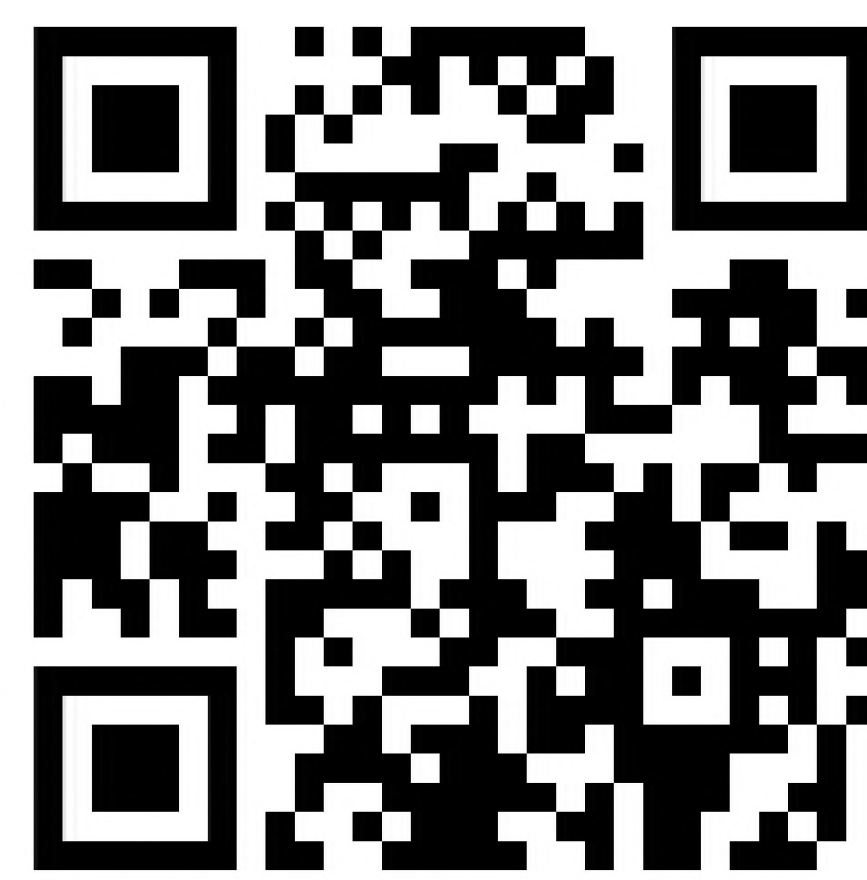
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## Biography

Sarah Farrance is a doctor of occupational therapy student at Cleveland State University. Sarah received her undergraduate at Kent State University in exercise science. While Sarah works with older adults as a rehab aide at an inpatient rehab hospital in Akron, she is undecided as to which population she would like to work with. Sarah enjoys working with people of all ages and abilities and is excited to become an occupational therapist.



## Acknowledgements

I'd like to take the time to thank several people who helped me to make it to the "end of the tunnel."

I want to thank my family for their love, support, and understanding throughout the ups and downs of graduate school. I also want to thank my co-workers for all their encouragement, support, and guidance! Likewise, I want to thank my fieldwork educators for walking me through what it looks like to be an occupational therapist in practice. Your encouragement, kindness, and patience went a long way! Lastly, I want to thank my friends and church community. Thank you providing me with dinner when I was so busy that I didn't know what to do, for loving me when I was exhausted, and for listening when I needed support. I wouldn't be here without the help of all of you! Thank you!

## Sources

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