

# Trauma and Poverty

## Support for Trauma-informed Education in Postsecondary Systems (STEPS) Webinar Series

Provided by the Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support (ICSPS)

February 18, 2021



# STEPS Webinar Series

- ▶ Feb. 4 Trauma-awareness in Postsecondary Settings
- ▶ Feb. 11 Trauma During a Pandemic
- ▶ Feb. 18 Trauma and Poverty
- ▶ Feb. 25 Historical Trauma
- ▶ April 29 Implementation Check-in and Support

<https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu>

# Today's Objectives

Deepen

Deepen understanding of adverse experiences and resulting trauma in the context of poverty.

Increase

Increase awareness of trauma's impact in postsecondary settings as well as trauma-informed practices to support learners.

Create

Continue to create a community of professional learners as a resource for future support.

# Agenda



BRIEF REVIEW  
OF BIG IDEAS  
RELATED TO  
TRAUMA



POVERTY IN  
OUR SOCIETY



RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN  
POVERTY AND  
TRAUMA



DEEPER DIVE  
INTO  
STRATEGIES



PARTICIPANT  
INPUT AND  
DISCUSSION

Trigger Warning:  
Please feel free to shift for  
the purpose of self-care...

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What do we know about trauma?

## What is trauma?

An **event**, series of events, *witnessing of an event*, or set of circumstances that:

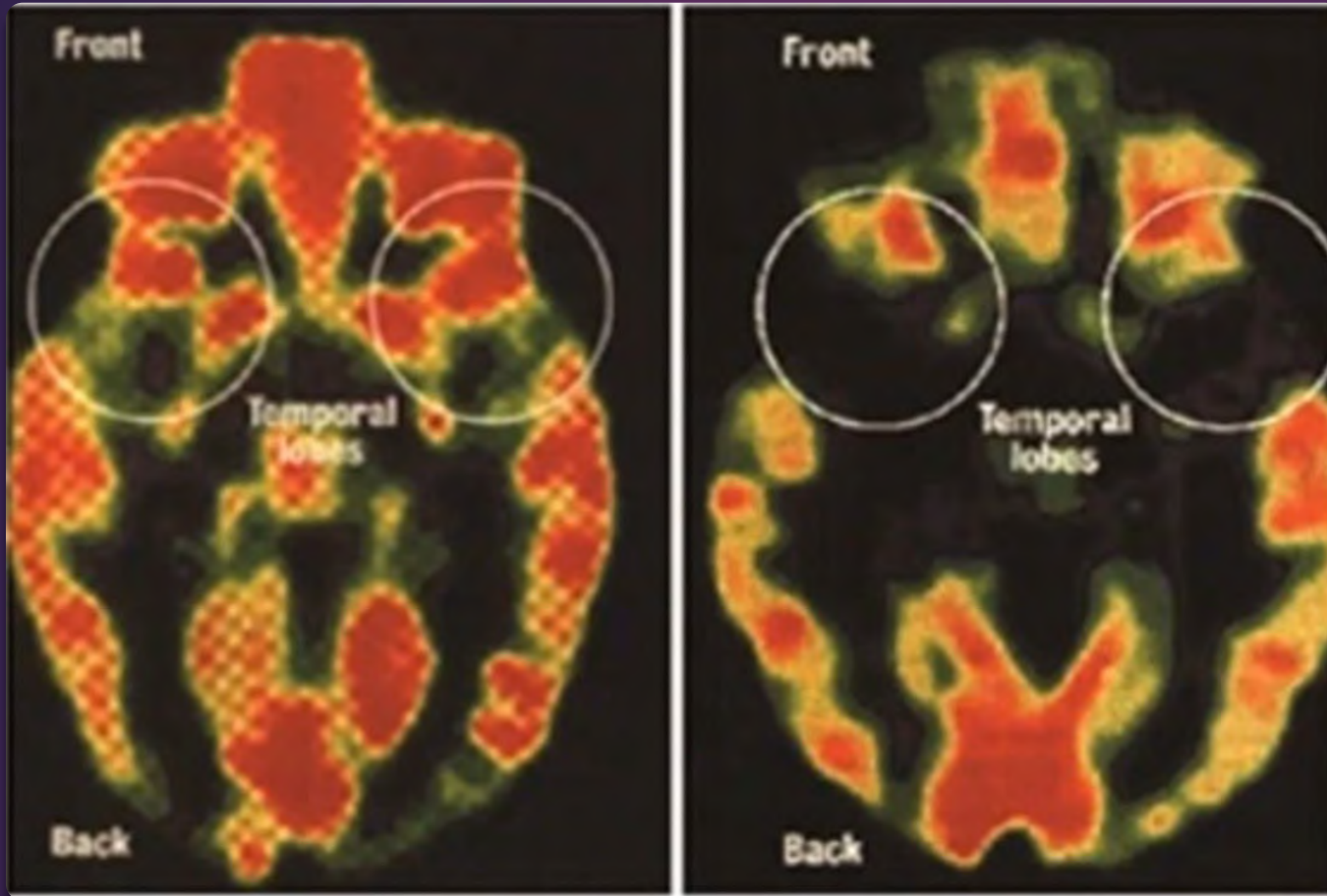
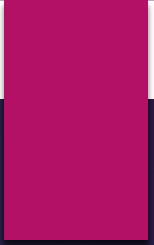
- ▶ Is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful.
- ▶ Overwhelms a person's ability to cope and creates involuntary biological responses.
- ▶ Has adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and well-being.

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Trauma is  
Neurological

# Survival (Trauma) vs. Thinking Brain

## Survival Brain

- Monitors for threat
- Sounds a neurological alarm
- Activates auto responses
  - Fight
  - Flight
  - Freeze
  - Fawn

## Thinking Brain

- Judges, makes decisions, controls emotions
- Provides a rational “brake”
- Helps the body come back into balance
- Goes offline during threat, real or perceived

# Through a Trauma Lens

- ▶ Snake or Stick (from “Connecting Paradigms” by Matthew Bennett)
- ▶ Emotional Abuse or Tough Teacher
- ▶ Police or Campus Security



## Emotional

- Irritability, sadness, anxiety, depression, guilt, grief, fear, apathy/numbness, agitation, trouble forming relationships, low self-esteem

## Behavioral

- Withdrawal, aggression, crying, worry, risk-taking, difficulty communicating/listening, blaming, regressed behaviors

## Physical

- Headaches/stomachaches, heart racing, fatigue, muscle pain, disrupted sleep/appetite, heightened startle response

## Cognitive

- Difficulty processing information, confusion, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, racing thoughts, preoccupation with event, intrusive thoughts/memories

Trauma does not guarantee an outcome!  
Individual trauma responses vary due to:

Development

Temperament

Perception

Trauma History

Post-Trauma  
Events

Available  
Support

# Resilience

**A positive, adaptive response to significant adversity.**

Resilience is supported by protective factors including:

- ▶ Adaptable, caring, and supportive relationships
- ▶ A sense of mastery over life circumstances
- ▶ Affirming cultural and/or faith traditions
- ▶ Safe, supportive environments (schools, communities)



# A Trauma- Informed Approach

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**Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;

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**Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;

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**Responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and

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Seeks to actively **resist** retraumatization.

# A Journey

- ▶ Trauma-Aware
- ▶ Trauma-Sensitive
- ▶ Trauma-Responsive
- ▶ Sustainable  
Implementation of  
Trauma-Informed  
Practice





Why become  
trauma-aware?

Why focus on the  
intersection of  
trauma and  
poverty?



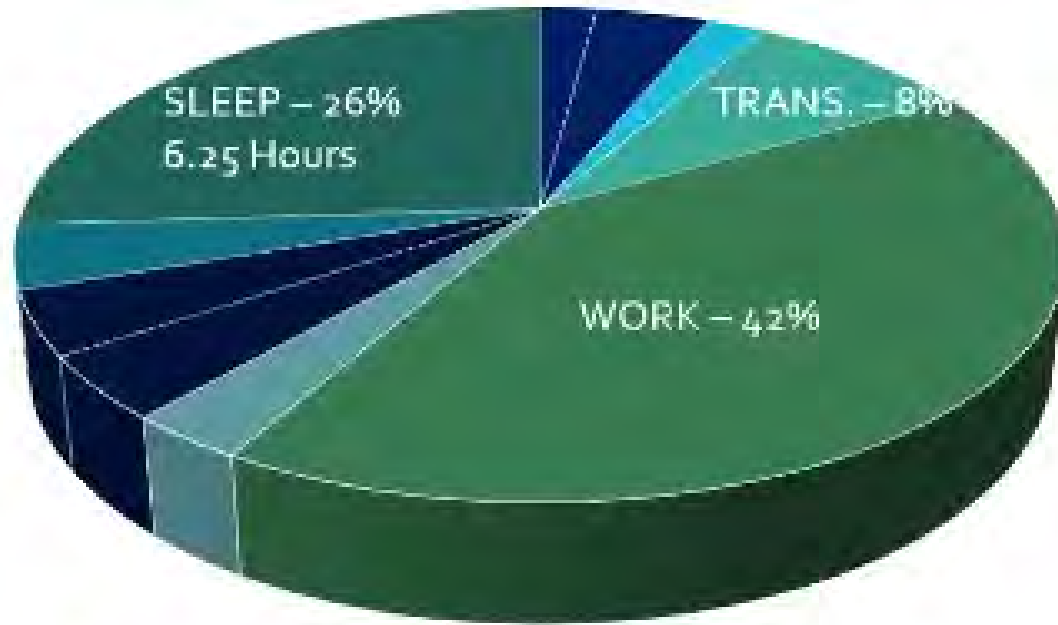
# Reflection on poverty...

- ▶ What do you believe causes poverty?
- ▶ Where do your beliefs come from? Parents? Community? Personal experiences?
- ▶ How are your experiences and exposure to opportunities, while growing up, different than the students you serve?
- ▶ Do you know relevant facts about poverty?
- ▶ Are you able to suspend judgement and assume that people are making the best decisions possible from their vantage point and with their available resources?
- ▶ Are you able to assist students who may believe and make choices differently than you?



Persons in Family/Household	Poverty Guideline
1	\$12,490
2	\$16,910
3	\$21,330
4	\$25,750
5	\$30,170
6	\$34,590

Economic  
Empowerment:  
Looking at  
Reality



- Morning Routine
- Morning Child Care
- Walking Children to School
- Bus Trips
- Work
- Dinner
- Chores
- TV
- Kids to Bed
- Sleep

# It's About Time

Single mother  
 Three kids  
 Two part-time jobs  
 Living under the  
 poverty line

# Mythology

There is no culture of poverty.

There is only human behavior and brain science in response to stimuli and circumstance.

Stereotyping related to poverty compounds trauma.

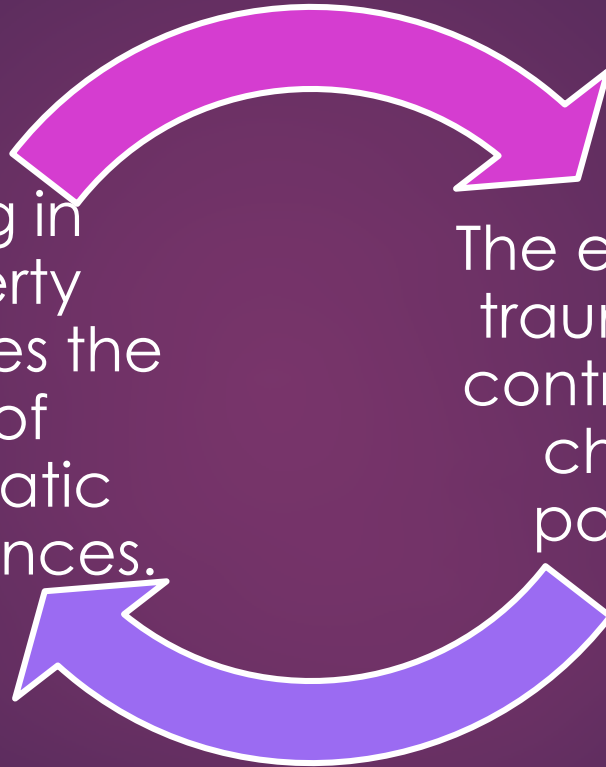


1. Living in poverty can be a traumatic experience.

2.

Living in poverty increases the risk of traumatic experiences.

The effects of trauma can contribute to chronic poverty.



# Traumatic Life Experiences

- ▶ Physical or sexual abuse
- ▶ Abandonment, neglect, or betrayal of trust (such as abuse from a primary caregiver)
- ▶ Death or loss of a loved one
- ▶ Caregiver having a life-threatening illness
- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Chronically chaotic housing and financial circumstances
- ▶ Serious accident
- ▶ Bullying
- ▶ Life-threatening health situations and/or painful medical procedures
- ▶ Witnessing or experiencing community violence - shootings, stabbings, robberies
- ▶ Witnessing police activity or having a family member incarcerated
- ▶ Life-threatening natural disasters
- ▶ Acts or threats of terrorism (viewed in person or on television)
- ▶ Military combat
- ▶ Historical/racial trauma

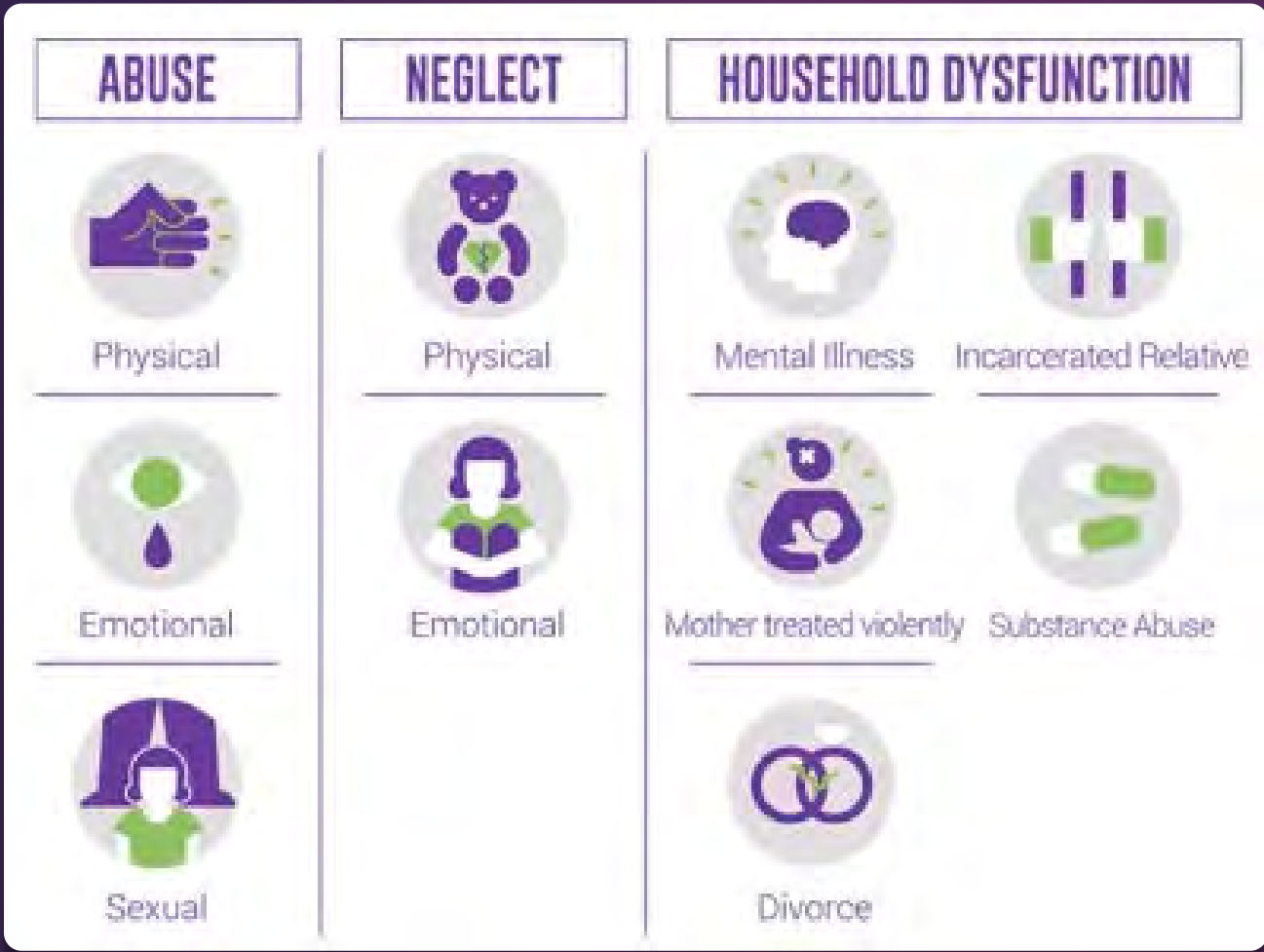


# Consider Poverty in America

- ▶ According to 2010 US Census, 15% of Americans live in poverty
- ▶ 1/4 working households in America pay more than half of pre-tax salary on rent. (National Low Income Housing Coalitions 2014 study showed that no community had rentals prices low enough for minimum wage earners to live comfortably.)
- ▶ 46 million people suffer food insecurity and one-third of this group experienced chronic hunger.
- ▶ 2/3 people living in poverty are working 1.7 jobs.

# Consider Childhood Poverty

- ▶ In March 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics declared poverty as the single most pressing, chronic health issue facing children in the U.S.
- ▶ Academic achievement numbers are low for the children of families who struggle to meet their basic needs
- ▶ Recent research has shown that poverty is likely the largest determinant of adverse health experiences throughout the lifespan.
- ▶ The lifespan itself is reduced by the presence of poverty during early childhood.



# ACES: Adverse Childhood Experiences

# Poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences

- 1) **Childhood poverty is prevalent in America.** 2018 data shows 1 in 6 American children living in poverty and 13 million food insecure *before the pandemic*.
- 2) **Childhood poverty impacts brain development over time.** Rapid neuron connectivity is especially impacted by trauma and chronic stress from the womb through the first 8 years but continues to impact brain development through one's teens and early twenties.
- 3) **Childhood poverty leads to long-term outcomes that are mental, emotional, and physical.** Effects of trauma are initially processed by the developing brain, but a cascade of effects are expressed in many ways later in life, including physical disease caused by inflammation.

# Poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences



4) **No event guarantees an outcome.** The likelihood is greater for later life poor health if a child experiences sustained racism, poverty, violence, housing instability and food insecurity (Shonkoff, Harvard University). However, children can grow up in poverty and experience one or more ACE and be okay, especially if a caregiver shields them from impacts.

5) **Early investments in children pay off.** Reducing hardships and negative or traumatic situations for pregnant women and families of children can show improved health and outcomes across the lifespan.

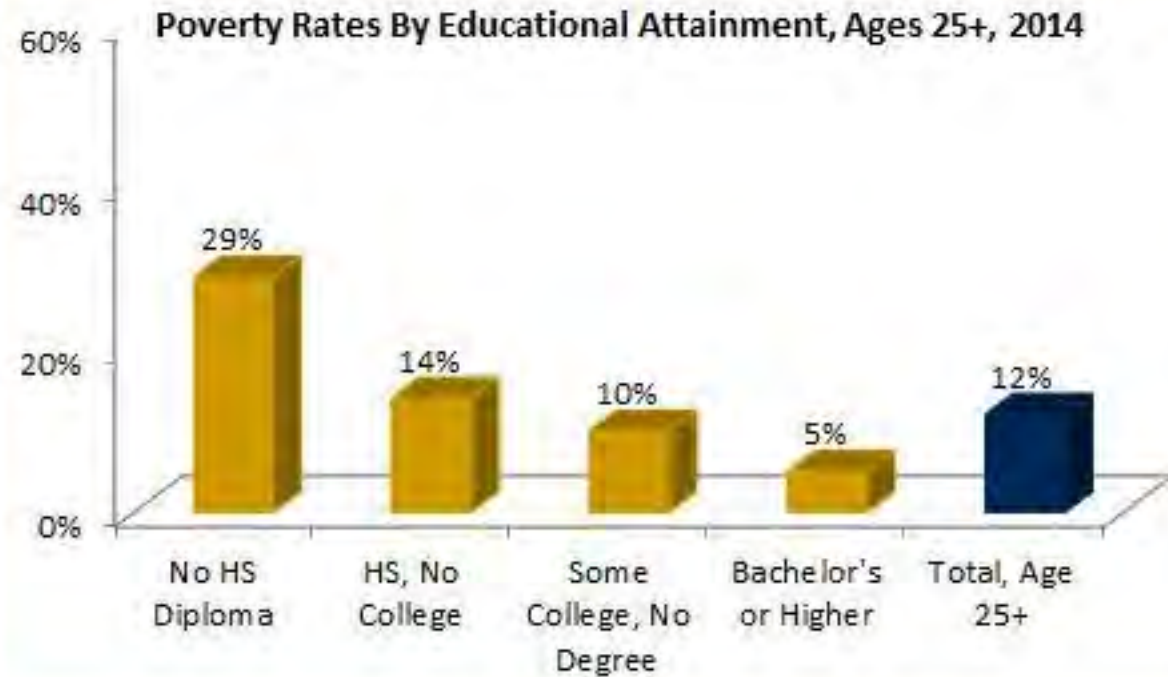
# Will they make it to your classroom?

Poverty creates and is created by disparities in:

- ▶ Financial resources
- ▶ Family responsibilities
- ▶ Preparation in secondary ed
- ▶ Health – mental, emotional, and physical



# The Power of Retention



DeNavas-Walt, Carmen and Bernadette D. Proctor, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014*

U.S. Census Bureau. *Current Population Reports P60-252*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2015.

# A Social Ecological Model

A 3D rendering of a puzzle with one red piece standing out from a grey background. The puzzle pieces are arranged in a grid, and the red piece is the central focus, positioned slightly to the right of the center. The lighting creates soft shadows, giving the pieces a three-dimensional appearance.

Promotes a multi-faceted approach.

- ▶ Individual
- ▶ Interpersonal
- ▶ Organizational
- ▶ Community
- ▶ Policy



# System-level Strategies:

## **Cultivate a Supportive Environment**

**Know the Needs in your System**– internal data review as part of your improvement process

## **Partner within the Community**

- ▶ Promote available services and programs to all students

## **Integrate Educational Efforts Vertically**

- ▶ Advocate for secondary course offerings and inclusion
- ▶ Recruitment – remove the mystery of what's possible
- ▶ Communicate supports before students enroll

## **Scale Support across the System**

- ▶ Clarify and concisely communicate available supports
- ▶ Simplify access Ex: opt out models
- ▶ Amplify counseling relationships

## Trauma- informed Principles: Identify the Needs

- ▶ **Safety:** Physical and Emotional – is the environment safe, accessible, and welcoming?
- ▶ **Trustworthiness** – are goals and related procedures clear, communicated, and consistent?
- ▶ **Choice and Control** – do learners know their options, have choice whenever possible, and experience logical consequences for choices?
- ▶ **Collaboration** – are learners invited to contribute meaningfully regarding their own learning goals and program design as a whole?
- ▶ **Empowerment and High Expectations** – are learners' strengths recognized, and do instructors convey genuine optimism in their ability to continuously grow and meet goals?

# Instructional Considerations

**Curriculum design** that accounts for variability – Universal Design for Learning

**Instructional practices** that promote:

- ▶ Creating attachment
- ▶ Dealing with distress
- ▶ Building self-worth
- ▶ Calm transitions
- ▶ Emotional regulation
- ▶ Promoting executive functioning skills
- ▶ Resourcefulness and flexibility
- ▶ Measuring mastery via flexible means

Combat the tendency for individuals to internalize impoverished circumstances as a personal deficiency.



# Strengths perspective approach

Empower students by focusing on what they know, their skills, and family/community strengths.

- ▶ Look for and verbally recognize the strengths and skills of students.
- ▶ Create opportunities for students to incorporate strengths to show learning.
- ▶ Stand in awe of people fighting poverty.
- ▶ Ask students for their help. Find ways they can contribute, feel helpful, and be included.
- ▶ Tell people you are happy to see them; make them feel wanted and valued.
- ▶ Practice empathy instead of sympathy.

# Asset Theory

The more assets a student has, both internal (conflict resolution skills, sense of purpose, etc.) and external (adult relationships, caring school climate, etc.), the more likely they will succeed.

- ▶ Learn what assets your students have and what services or opportunities they need to move forward. Connect them to resources.
- ▶ Build partnerships in your community so you know where to find resources.
- ▶ Help people navigate the middle-class world such as paperwork, asking the right questions, taking steps, etc.

# Faulty Attribution Theory

The attribution of motives to someone else's behavior without discovering the "why" behind their actions impedes progress.

- ▶ Withhold judgement of behavior.
- ▶ Tell yourself people are doing the best they can with the information and resources they possess.
- ▶ Remind yourself that your experiences and world view may be different from those you serve.
- ▶ Attempt to find out the "why" behind behavior.

# Social Capital Theory

People increase their chances for success when they have meaningful connections with those who can help.

- ▶ Introduce people to others who have benefitted from education.
- ▶ Tell people about opportunities (programs, events, etc.) that you know will put them in a place to build relationships with people who are educated.
- ▶ Make connections face-to-face when possible, instead of giving phone numbers or a “list” of people/agencies to call.



# Individual Healing

- ▶ Therapy
- ▶ Mindfulness
- ▶ Body Work/Breathing
- ▶ **Relationships**

Remember, there is proven neuro-plasticity during the life span.



Trauma-aware  
instructors  
and  
administrators  
can:



Care



Be aware



Be flexible



Point to resources

# ICSPS Special Populations Strategies Series

Webinars detailing CTE programs' ability to support students who are

- ▶ Economically disadvantaged
- ▶ English Learners
- ▶ Learning with disabilities
- ▶ Interested in non-traditional fields
- ▶ Parenting teens, single mothers, and pregnant mothers
- ▶ Out of the workforce

Webinars, documents, and presentations are archived on the ICSPS website:

<https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu>

A hand holding a smartphone displaying a video call with a woman. The background is a blurred indoor setting. A pink rectangular graphic is in the top right corner.

Resource:

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) provides local treatment information, support groups, community services, free publications.

