

Generational Trauma

Cassy Schraft, MEd, LPC

Behavioral Health Therapist

Door County Department of Health and Human Services

Goals

1. Better understand generational trauma and how trauma gets transmitted
2. Better understand effective ways to treat and support individuals and families
3. Reflect on your own experiences

Understanding Trauma

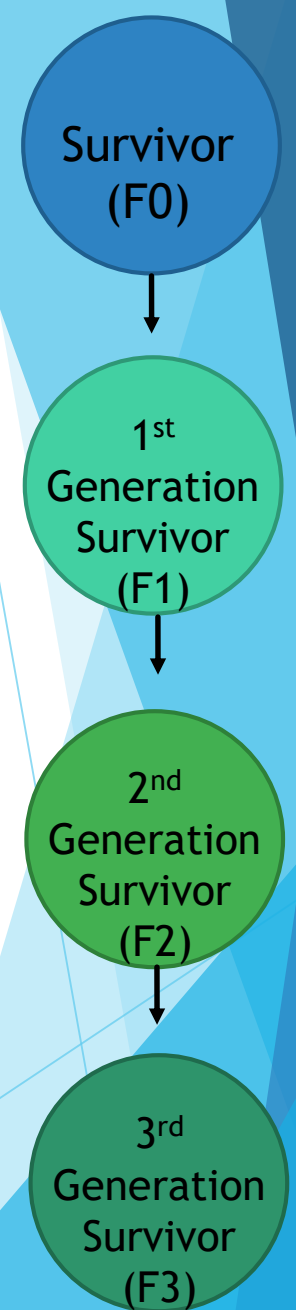
When everything is trauma, then nothing is trauma.

- ▶ Trauma - “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence”
 - ▶ Experienced first hand, witnessed, learned about, or repeatedly exposed to the details
- ▶ Trauma response - an individual’s reaction to the traumatic event
 - ▶ It is the person’s perception of the event that is traumatizing, not the event itself
 - ▶ Having a trauma response does not mean a person has PTSD
- ▶ 70-90% of people will experience at least one trauma during their life
- ▶ 20% of people who experience trauma will develop PTSD
 - ▶ Treatment is effective in reducing symptoms and their severity
 - ▶ 1/3 never see full elimination of symptoms
- ▶ About half of people with PTSD also meet criteria for a substance use disorder

(American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Benjet et al, 2016; Milanak et al, 2019; NIMH, 2017)

Defining Generational Trauma & Other Important Terms

- ▶ Generational Trauma - When an individual has a trauma response to a trauma experienced by a family member in a previous generation
 - ▶ Also referred to as: Trans-Generational Trauma, Intergenerational Trauma, Multi-Generational Trauma, Inherited Family Trauma, Hereditary Trauma
- ▶ Not the same as
 - ▶ Intergenerational transmission of violence and abuse
 - ▶ Patterns of traumatizing behavior (i.e. violence and abuse) that get repeated with each generation in a family system
 - ▶ Historical Trauma
 - ▶ Where the trauma is experienced by a collective group of people
 - ▶ Unique implications as opposed to trauma experienced on a more individual basis
 - ▶ Communal trauma, cultural trauma



(Lehrner and Yehuda, 2018)

Knowing What We Know

- ▶ First referenced in *Children in War* (1943) by Anna Freud & Dorothy Burlingham
- ▶ First studied in 1966 in Holocaust survivors' offspring
- ▶ 1988 found impacts in grandchildren of Holocaust survivors
- ▶ Research has been contradictory
- ▶ Limitations in generalizing
- ▶ Some is still theoretical

(Rakoff, 1966; Sigal et al, 1988;
Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018; Yehuda
et al, 2018)

Symptoms and Characteristics of Generational Trauma

- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Phobias
- ▶ Panic attacks
- ▶ Attention/concentration issues
- ▶ Self-harming
- ▶ Conduct problems
- ▶ School problems
- ▶ Behavior problems
- ▶ Emotional sensitivity
- ▶ Hypervigilance
- ▶ Startle response
- ▶ Attachment issues
- ▶ Substance use
- ▶ Perfectionism
- ▶ Eating disorders
- ▶ Nightmares
- ▶ Sleep issues
- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Relationship problems

Looking at Trauma Through a Generational Lens

“What’s wrong with you?”

(Looking at the problematic behavior)



“What happened to you?”

(Looking at the behavior within the context of the person’s life experiences)



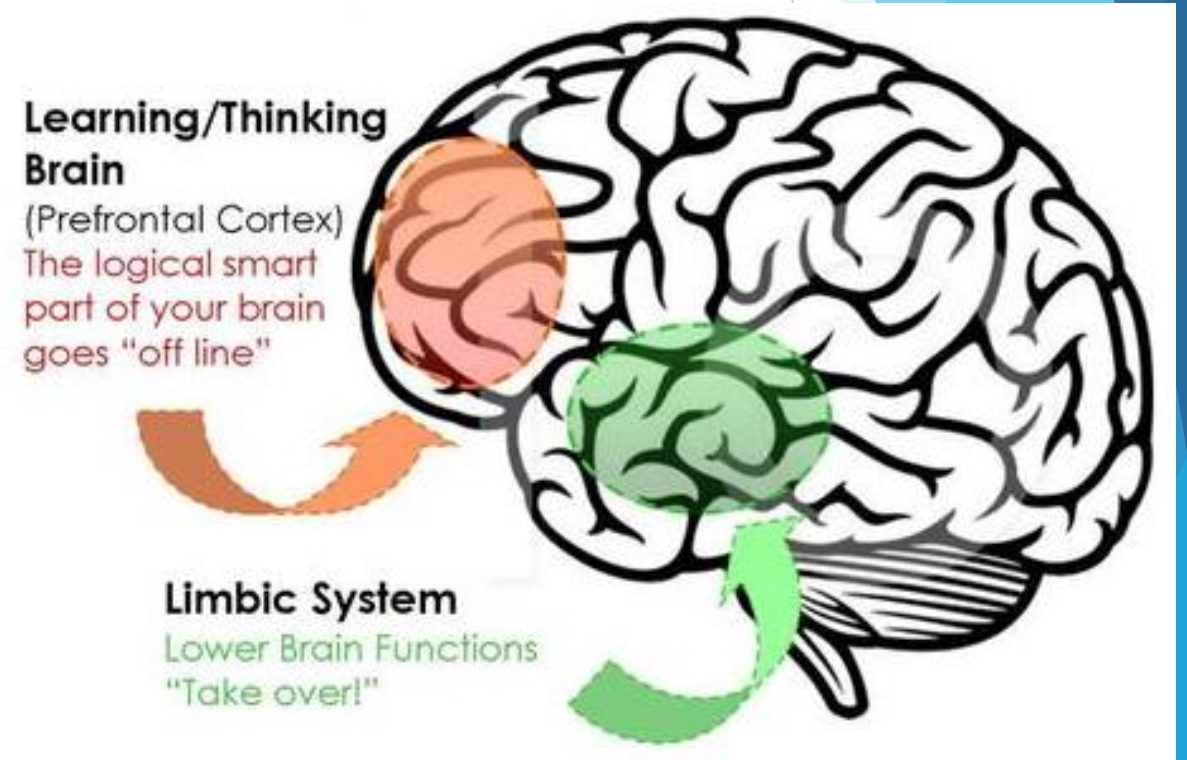
“What happened in your family?”

(Looking at the behavior, not just within the context of the individual’s own experiences, but the family and family member’s experiences)

i.e. What happened to mom/dad/grandma/grandpa/etc.?

Epigenetics - How We Inherit Trauma

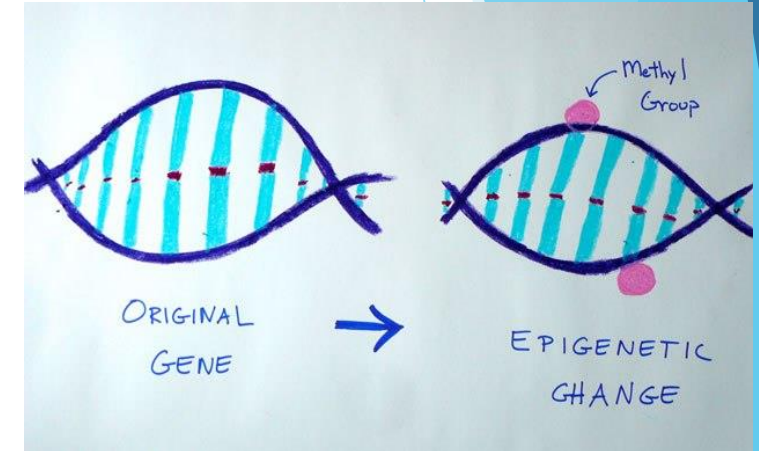
- ▶ Epigenetics is the modification of gene expression
- ▶ The function of the gene changes without the DNA changing
 - ▶ Genetic code itself does not change
 - ▶ Expression of a trait can get turned on and off
 - ▶ These changes are fairly permanent
- ▶ Changes in gene expression are not the same
As the body and brain's chemical response to stress and trauma



(Wolynn, 2016; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018)

Epigenetics - How We Inherit Trauma

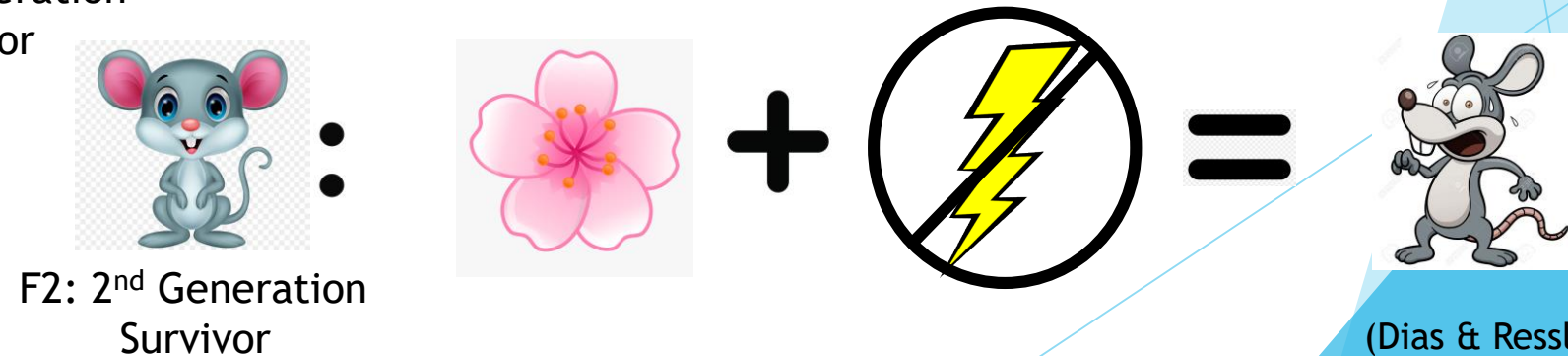
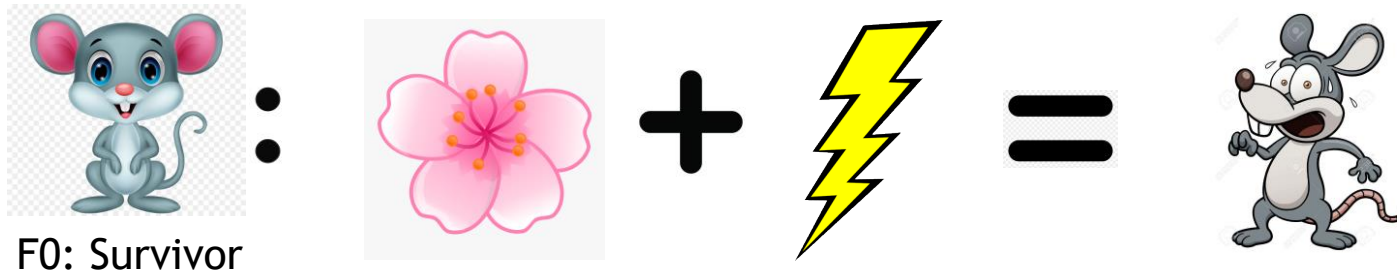
- ▶ 2% of DNA accounts for our physical traits
- ▶ 98% of DNA is considered noncoding DNA
 - ▶ Responsible for emotional, behavioral, and personality traits
 - ▶ Can be affected by environmental influences
- ▶ Mechanism of epigenetic inheritance
 - ▶ DNA methylation - methyl group is added to the DNA that suppresses gene expression
- ▶ IT IS ACTUALLY A GOOD THING
 - ▶ Can help us “expand the range of ways we respond to stressful situations”
 - ▶ Prepares us for the traumas our parents experienced



(Dias & Ressler, 2014; Dias & Kessler, 2014; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018)

Epigenetics - How We Inherit Trauma

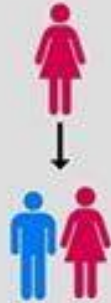
► The Cherry Blossom Study in mice



(Dias & Ressler, 2014)

Intergenerational transmission

Exposure leads to changes in phenotype in children



Multigenerational transmission

Exposure leads to changes in phenotype in children and grandchildren



Transgenerational transmission

Exposure leads to changes in phenotype in children, grandchildren, and subsequent generations to exposed to initial insult



Mommy
PhD

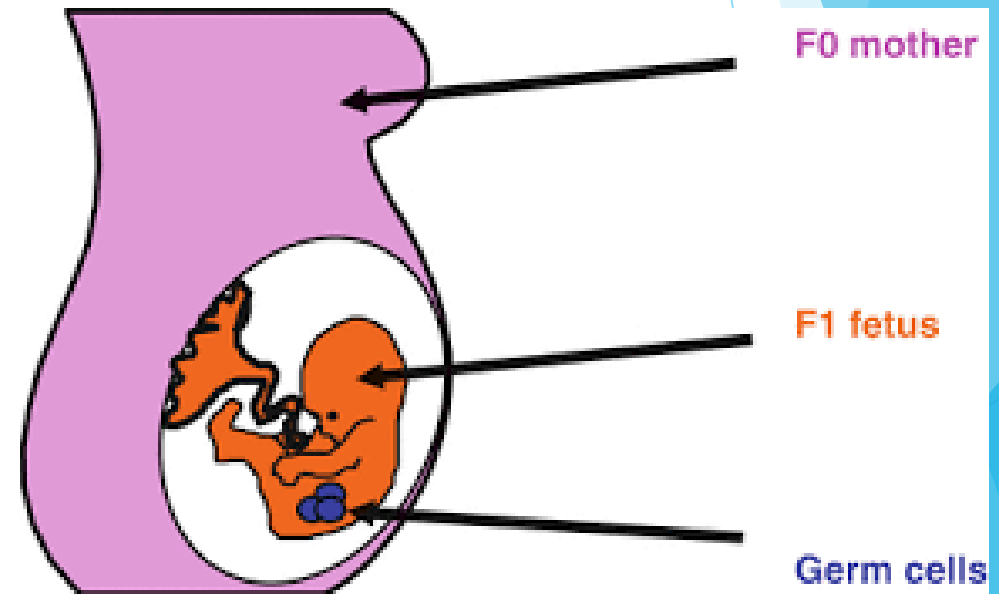
@mommyphd2

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fb.com/MommyPhD

Pregnancy - How We Inherit Trauma

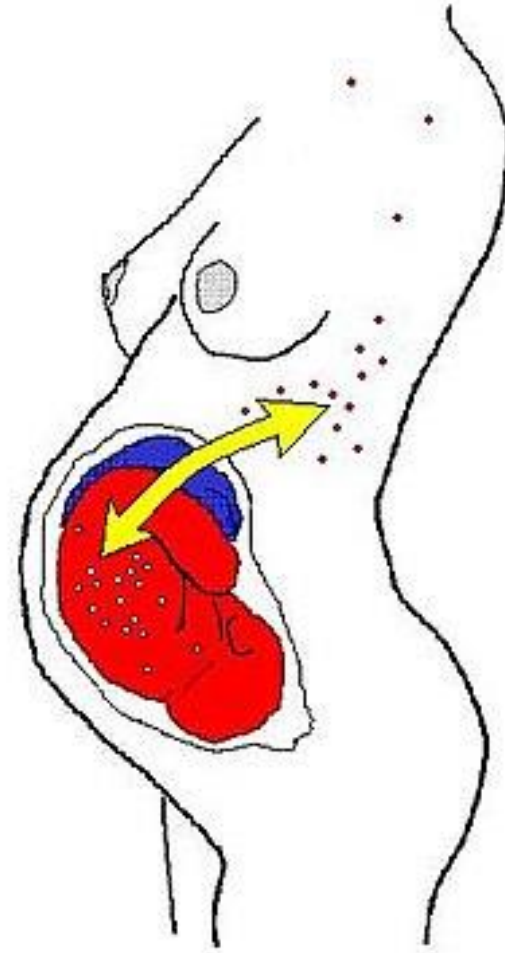
- ▶ Maternal stress and trauma impact the uterine environment
 - ▶ Studies following woman pregnant near the WTC on 9/11
- ▶ Trauma or stress that a mother experiences during pregnancy not only impacts the developing offspring, but the germ cells that will create her grandchildren
 - ▶ 3 generations are exposed to the event all at once



(Yehuda et al, 2005)

Pregnancy - How We Inherit Trauma

- ▶ Fetal-maternal microchimerism
 - ▶ Cellular information from the offspring is passed to the mother



(Chan et al, 2012)

Parenting & Behaviors - How We Inherit Trauma

- ▶ Trauma response is passed on through parent's behavior
 - ▶ Communication style regarding the trauma
 - ▶ Conspiracy of silence vs. oversharing
 - ▶ Parenting style
 - ▶ Responsibility child feels to their parent for their suffering
 - ▶ Identification with the parent's suffering
- ▶ Messages about the caregiver's trauma
 - ▶ Child must suffer because the parent suffered
 - ▶ Parent's suffering is the basis of comparison
 - ▶ Parent's unhealthy coping strategies for dealing with trauma reminders

(Adelman, 1995; Baranowsky et al, 1998; Doucet & Rovers, 2010; Duarte et al, 2019; Mor, 1990)

Disenfranchised Grief

- ▶ “the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported”

(Doka, 1989)

Transmission of Resiliency

- ▶ Resiliency is transmitted in the same ways as trauma
- ▶ Many people who experience trauma are able to continue moving forward without the event causing significant disruption to their lives
- ▶ Post-traumatic Growth
 - ▶ “the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises”
 - ▶ Reconstructs the narrative of the traumatic event to one of triumph
 - ▶ Finds meaning in the event and results in personal growth
 - ▶ Viktor Frankl

(Gapp et al, 2016; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004)

Therapy Treatment

- ▶ Intergenerational Trauma Treatment Model (ITTM)
- ▶ Trauma - Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- ▶ Attachment Self-Regulation and Competency (ARC)
- ▶ Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- ▶ Narrative
- ▶ Family Systems

Therapy Treatment - ITTM

Table 1: Intergenerational Trauma Treatment Model: Major Therapeutic Activities

Treatment Phase	Therapeutic Strategies
<p><i>PHASE A</i></p> <p>6 group-based sessions attended by children's caregivers</p>	<p>Psycho-education on a broad spectrum of trauma-related literature</p> <p>Cognitive-behavioral framework introduced for understanding behavior and for the promotion of meta-cognition and self-reflection</p> <p>Caregiver monitoring of self-regulation and of their position relative to the child's need for understanding and containment</p> <p>Promotion of self-efficacy through daily monitoring of change</p>
<p>Phase B</p> <p>Average of 8 individual sessions with children's caregivers</p>	<p>Cognitive-behavioral processing of traumatic or impactful experience in caregiver's childhood; identification of trauma theme, deconstruction and disputation of the faulty belief system by the therapist, attribution of belief to childhood experiences</p> <p>Implementation of quality 1-on-1 time between caregiver and child (minimum of 3 hours a week)</p> <p>Co-development (caregiver and clinician) of hypothesis around the faulty belief(s) system developed in child as a result of impact of trauma or other impactful event.</p>
<p>Phase C</p> <p>3 to 8 sessions for the child with the caregiver present.</p>	<p>Directed sand tray stories and/or diagrams to address children's relational bond with their primary caregivers and for exposure and reconstruction of traumatic experience</p> <p>Cognitive-behavioral processing of child's traumatic experience; identification of dominant trauma theme, disputation of resulting faulty belief/dilemma for the child, countering of self-blame</p> <p>Active involvement of the caretaker as an observer and co-director of the therapy process</p> <p>As necessary, attachment recreation intervention to address security of relational bond between child and caregiver</p>

(Scott & Copping, 2008)

Therapy Treatment - TFCBT

Enhancing Safety
Psychoeducation
Relaxation
Affect Modulation
Cognitive Coping

Stabilization Phase

Trauma Narration
and Processing

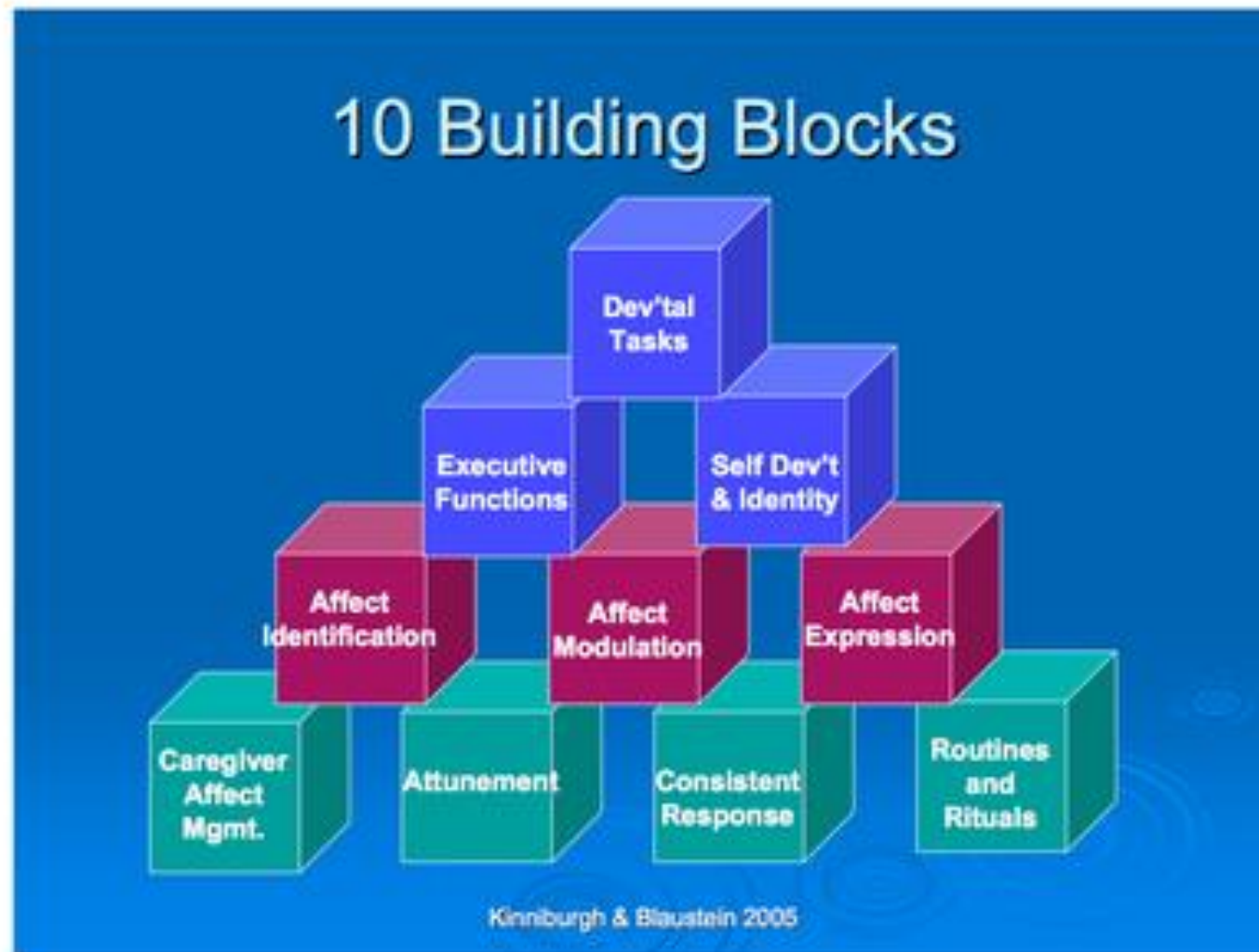
Trauma Narration Phase

In vivo
Conjoint Sessions
Enhancing Safety

Integration/ Consolidation Phase

(Cohen et al, 2017; Phipps & Thorne, 2019)

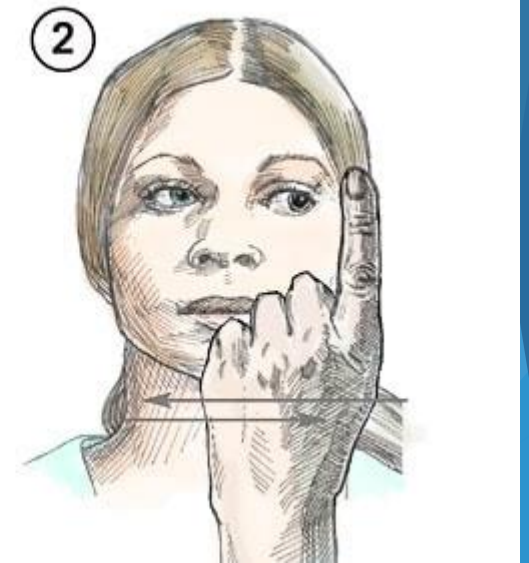
Therapy Treatment - ARC Framework



(Kinniburgh et al, 2005)

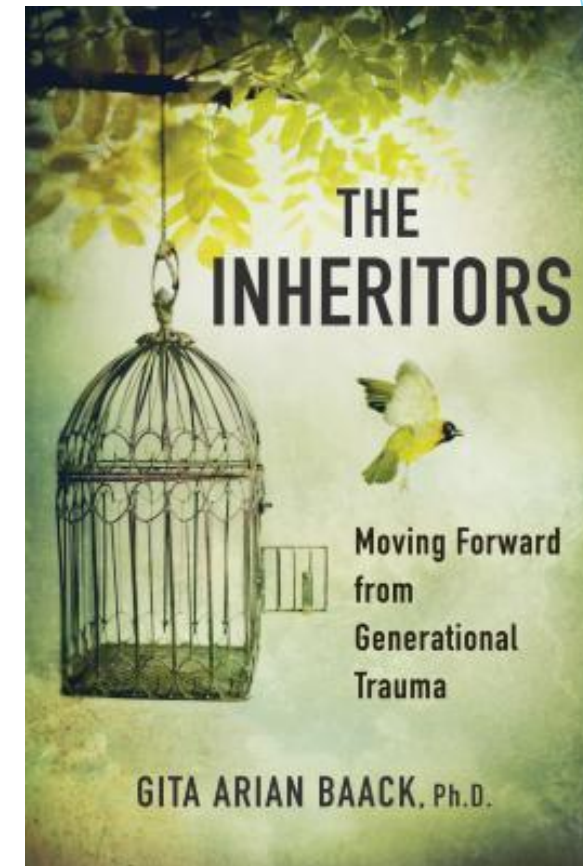
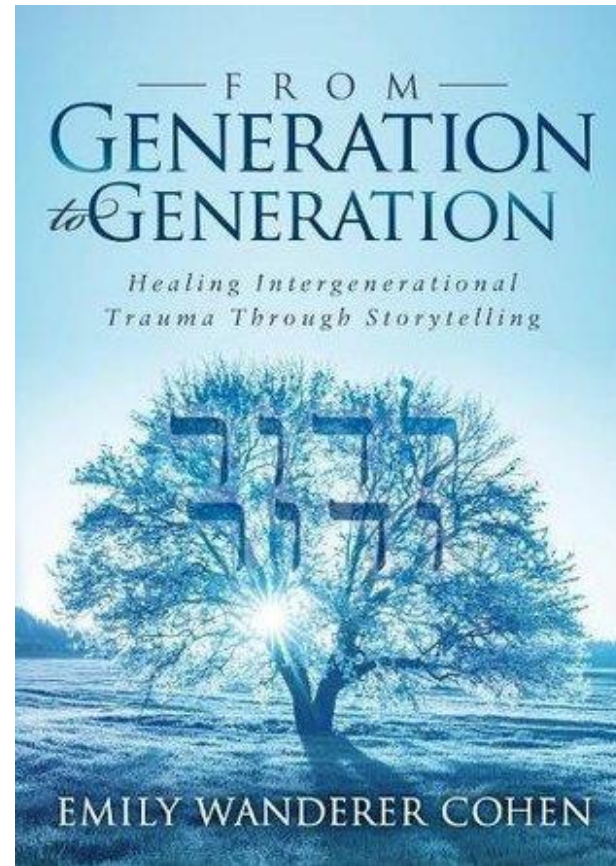
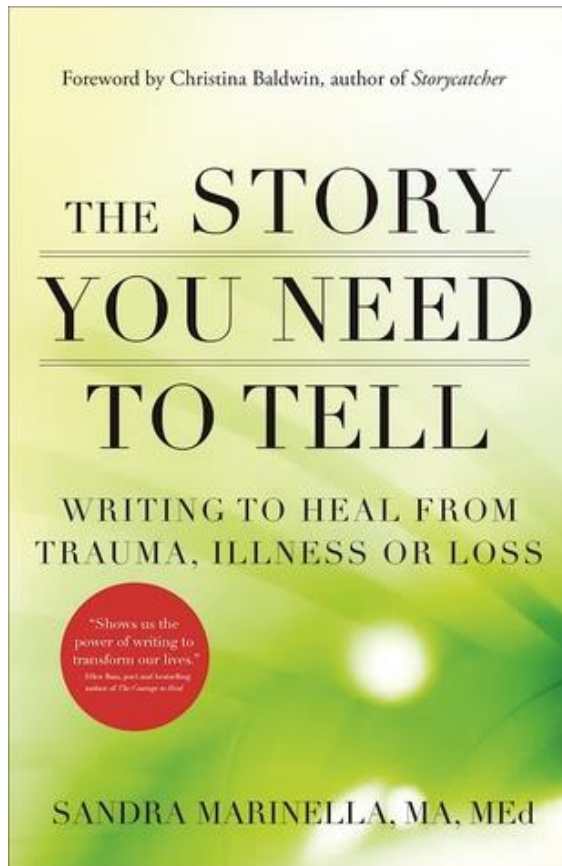
Therapy Treatment - EMDR

8 Interweaving Phases of EMDR



(Okawara & Paulsen, 2018;
Shapiro, 2014)

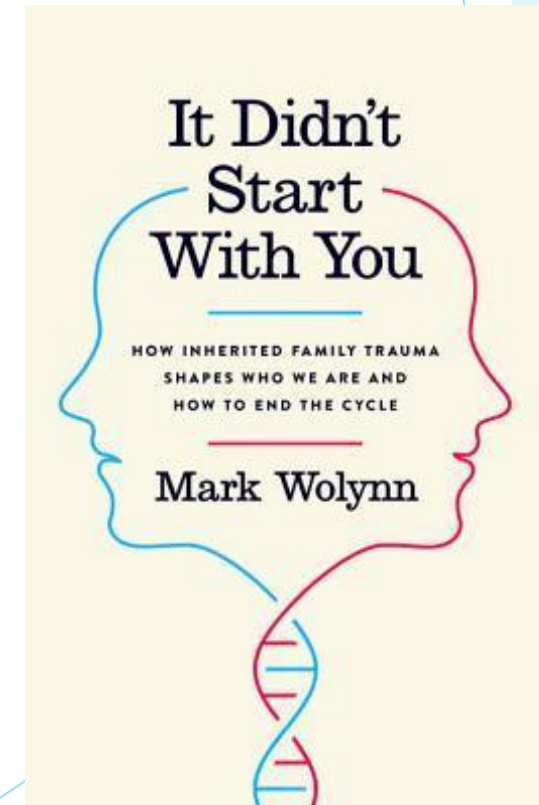
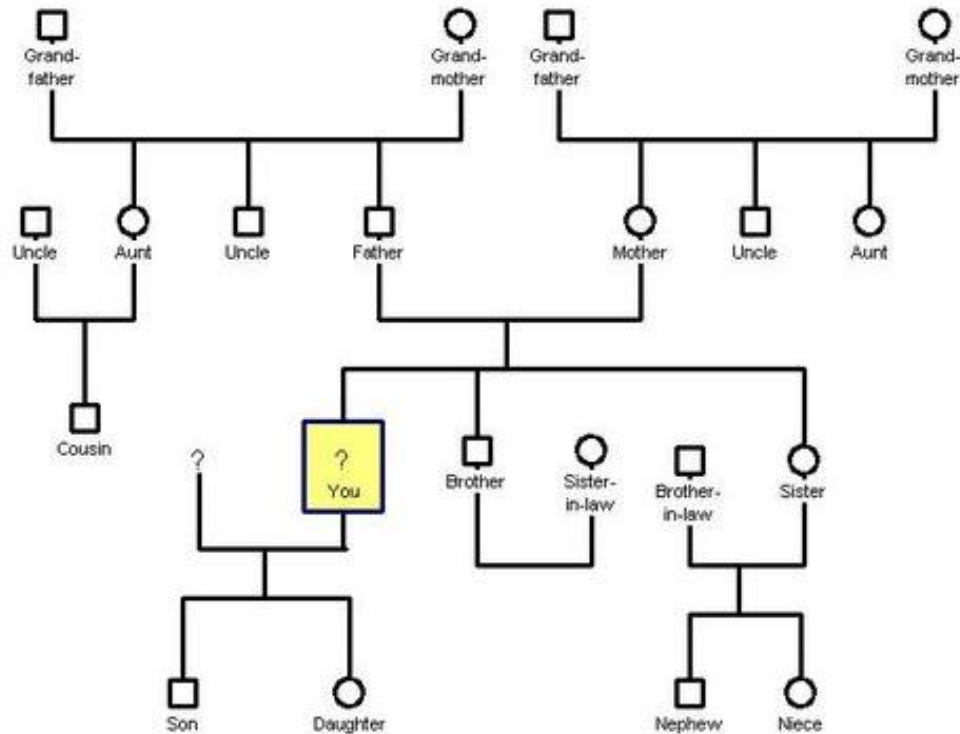
Therapy Treatment - Narrative



(Connolly, 2011)

Therapy Treatment - Family Systems

- ▶ Genograms
- ▶ Look for patterns
 - ▶ Where does the language not match up? Who in the family might have had that thought or experience?



Helping Clients Heal

- ▶ Change your lens
- ▶ Increase the client's knowledge
- ▶ Look at the family history/genogram
- ▶ Listen for unique language or language that seems out of place
- ▶ Hear their story
- ▶ Do your own self-reflection

Further Reading

- ▶ It Didn't Start with You by Mark Wolynn
- ▶ From Generation to Generation by Emily Wanderer Cohen
- ▶ The Inheritors by Gita Arian Baack
- ▶ When Ancestors Weep by James A. Houck, Jr.
- ▶ Survivor Café by Elizabeth Rosner
- ▶ Lost in Transmission by M. Gerard Fromm
- ▶ The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma by Meera Atkinson
- ▶ Adult Children of Alcoholics by Janet Geringer Woititz
- ▶ Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents by Lindsay C. Gibson
- ▶ Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome by Joy DeGruy

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the frame, creating a modern, layered effect.

The past is never dead; its not even
past.

William Faulkner

Questions, Comments, Reflections?

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