

**STRENGTHS-BASED
Trauma-Informed Services**



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What will be covered:



- A) Defining a Strengths-Based Approach
- B) Six Strengths-Based Interventions for Trauma-Informed Services
- C) Conclusion

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A) Defining a Strengths-Based Approach

Strengths-Based Approach (SBA) focuses on the identification, creation, & reinforcement of youths' individual, family, and community strengths & resources

(Powell, 2010b; 2011)

***Focusing on what is RIGHT with youth, not just what is wrong with them**

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SBA consists of an eclectic mix of psychological theories and interventions which include components that promote healthy development and assist youth in learning more about 'what to do' as opposed to 'what not to do'.

Humanistic
Solution-Focused
Cognitive-Behavioral
Social Learning Theory
Developmental Theory
Person-Centered
Family Systems
Interpersonal Therapy
Biopsychosocial Model

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B) Six Strengths-Based Interventions for Trauma-Informed Services

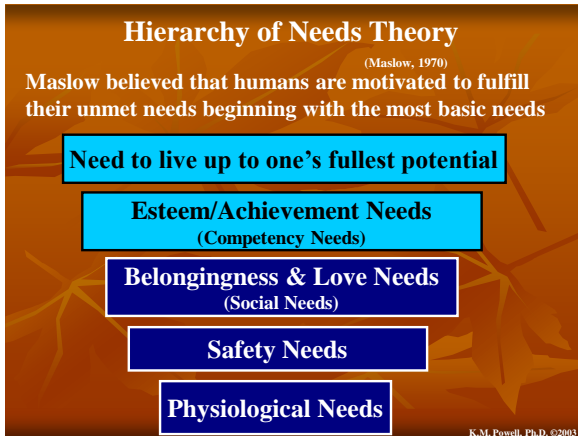
- 1) Meet Youth's *Basic Human Needs*
- 2) Strengthen *Bond between Youth and Stable Caregivers*
- 3) Promote *Hope & Optimism* within Youth & their Caregivers
- 4) Identify & Promote *Protective Factors* associated with *Resiliency*
- 5) Ask *Solution-Focused Questions* (exceptions to problems)
- 6) Help Youth Gain Insight into their *Healthy vs. Unhealthy Interpersonal Dynamics*

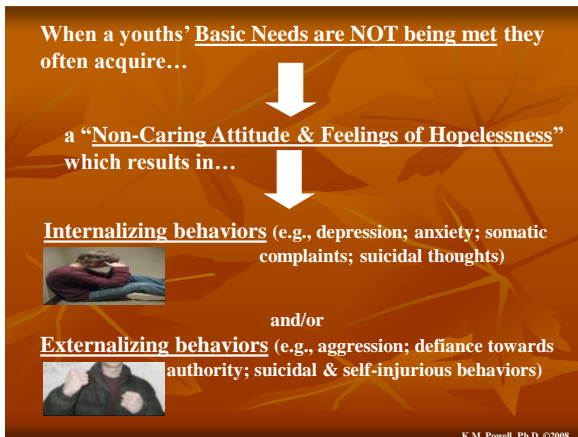
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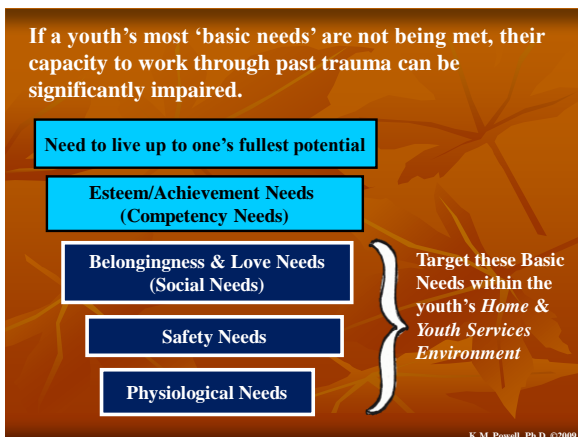
1) Meet Youth's Basic Human Needs

Meeting Basic Human Needs = *Stabilization
*Increased Tolerance To Manage Stress

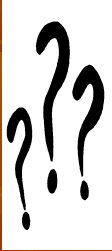
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*Important Questions to regularly ask yourself when working with at-risk youth (including youth with a history of victimization)...



- *What is motivating this youth?
- *What needs are unmet?
- *How can I help meet these unmet needs?

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2) Strengthen Bond between Youth and Stable Caregivers

Strategies for engaging Parents/ Caregivers in the youth service process include...



- a) *'Be Understanding/ Empathetic/ Patient'* with caregivers who are initially mistrustful and defensive.
- b) Place caregivers in the *'Expert Role'*
"What are your thoughts/ suggestions regarding how we can best help your son/daughter/grandchild?"

Create a *Collaborative, Team approach*

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- c) Ask caregivers about *'Their Own Self Care'*
"How are you doing?"

STABLE, NURTURING caregivers can be very healing for youth struggling with interpersonal trauma

(Biglan, Flay, Embry, & Sandler, 2012; Dozier, et al, 2009)

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3) Promote *Hope & Optimism* within Youth & their Caregivers

Although childhood victimization/trauma can result in youth exhibiting a variety of problematic symptoms that are disruptive to self and others (e.g., self injurious behaviors; emotional dysregulation; oppositional and aggressive behaviors; etc.)...

There are many reasons for **OPTIMISM** about these youth, which should be shared with youth and their families...**Promote HOPE!**

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a) Reason for Optimism: The Brain's Prefrontal Cortex is still Maturing

The Prefrontal Cortex governs our *Executive Functioning* which includes...



- *Ability to Anticipate Consequences (think before acting)
- *Ability to Regulate Emotions/ Impulse Control
- *Ability to Organize, Plan, & Problem-solve
- *Ability to Sustain and Shift Attention
- *Ability to Self-Motivate
- *Ability to have Insight into ourselves and others

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As we mature during adolescence and young adulthood, we more efficiently utilize the executive functioning area of the brain (prefrontal cortex)



The Prefrontal Cortex is not fully mature until early adulthood--mid 20's).

Casey, et al., 2000; Casey, et al., 2008; Diamond, 2002; Giedd, 2008; Giedd, et al., 1999; Sowell, et al., 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Spear, 2000; Steinberg, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Yurgelun-Todd, 2007

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b) Reason for Optimism: The Developing Brain is very responsive to experience due to "NEUROPLASTICITY"

Repeatedly practicing "healthy alternatives" to problematic behaviors stimulates brain pathways, which can help wire the brain in very positive ways.

Bennett, et al., 1996; Bryck & Fisher, 2012; Cicchetti & Tucker, 1994; Diamond, 2001; Nelson, 2003; Nelson & Bloom, 1997; Winerman, 2012

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Metaphor: "Mountain Path"
Understanding our Brain's Neuroplasticity Process



Providing a 'neurophysiological explanation' for the importance of practicing healthy coping skills everyday

→ Can help motivate youth and reduce their risk of giving up when they make mistakes/ relapse

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4) Identify and Promote Protective Factors associated with Resiliency



Resiliency: The capacity to overcome childhood adversity to lead successful, prosocial lives. The ability to bounce back.

Protective Factors: Strengths & resources found within youth, their families, and their community that increase the likelihood of positive outcomes in response to risk or adversity. These factors act as a buffer against life's many stressors.

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Protective Factors commonly associated with Resilient Youth (and Adults)

(based on Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Masten & Reed, 2002; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; and other studies cited)



Refer to the Handout section at www.kevinpowellphd.com

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5) Ask Solution-Focused Questions (exceptions to problems)

Rather than delve into the details of a youth's problems, take time to first explore the exceptions to their problems (solutions to problems).

Berg & Steiner, 2003; Corcoran & Stephenson, 2000; De Shazer, 1985, 1988, 1994; De Shazer, et al, 1986; Selekman, 1997

Youth with an Aggression Problem:

“Tell me about times when you have felt like assaulting someone but did not do it. How did you stop yourself?”

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Youth with a Self-Injurious Behavior Problem:

“Tell me about times when you have felt like self-cutting but did not do it. What did you do to stop yourself?”

Focus on Prosocial Behaviors not just Problem Behaviors...

“Tell me about times when you have helped others/ been caring towards others”

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6) Help Youth Gain Insight into their *Healthy vs. Unhealthy Interpersonal Dynamics*

Childhood victimization can significantly impair a youth's ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships.

Interpersonal behaviors that may have been *adaptive* at the time of their victimization (e.g., interacting in an overly guarded and/or aggressive manner) may be *maladaptive* in their present life

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Teaching youth about the reciprocal nature of relationships can help them gain insight into healthy interpersonal dynamics

Metaphor: "Throwing a Ball against the Wall"



Respectful/ Prosocial towards others



Get back Respect/ Prosocial from others

Disrespect/ Aggression towards others



Get back Disrespect/ Aggression from others

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Conclusion

Strengths-Based Trauma-Informed Services has many advantages, including...

When we (youth service providers) look beyond a youth's disruptive behaviors and emphasize strengths, protective factors, exceptions to problems, and the importance of establishing positive relationships & social connections...



It creates a **SAFE, TRUSTING ENVIRONMENT** in which youth are more open and less guarded, which is essential for effective services

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Comments, Questions?



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