



# What Young Children Teach Us:

**FACILITATING FAMILIES TOWARD HEALING FROM  
GENERATIONAL TRAUMA**

# Introduction



# Michael's Story



# Young Children Remember



# Young Children's Normative Fears



- ▶ Fear of abandonment
- ▶ Fear of losing love of important people
- ▶ Fear of body damage
- ▶ Fear of being bad

# When Reality Confirms Your Fears



# When Systems Harm Families

*“Family culture is present in all caregiving interactions. It is within culturally informed relationships that all development unfolds. Children learn to experience, regulate, and express emotion as defined by their cultural communities. **Children form protective relationships with caregivers that can ensure their safety within inequitable and racist environments. Children bring their cultural self to learning environments using exploration, yet some are encouraged while others are punished.**”*

- Dr. Barbara Stroud

# Understand Meaning of Behavior

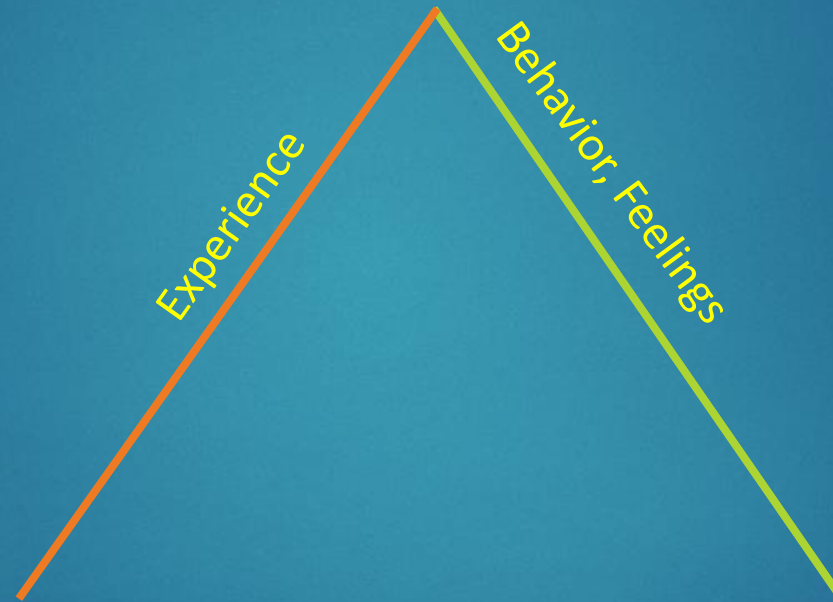


- ▶ Help caregiver notice behavior (child's, caregiver's, or another caregiver's)
- ▶ Help enhance reflective functioning in caregiver and child
- ▶ Provide developmental guidance regarding:
  - ▶ Age appropriate behavior
  - ▶ Developmental meaning of behavior
  - ▶ How children learn and develop



# Connecting Experiences to Functioning

## Michael's Experience?



## Michael's Behavior?

- Moody
- Cries a lot
- Hits peers, Mom and teachers
- Clingy
- Loss of joy and exploration

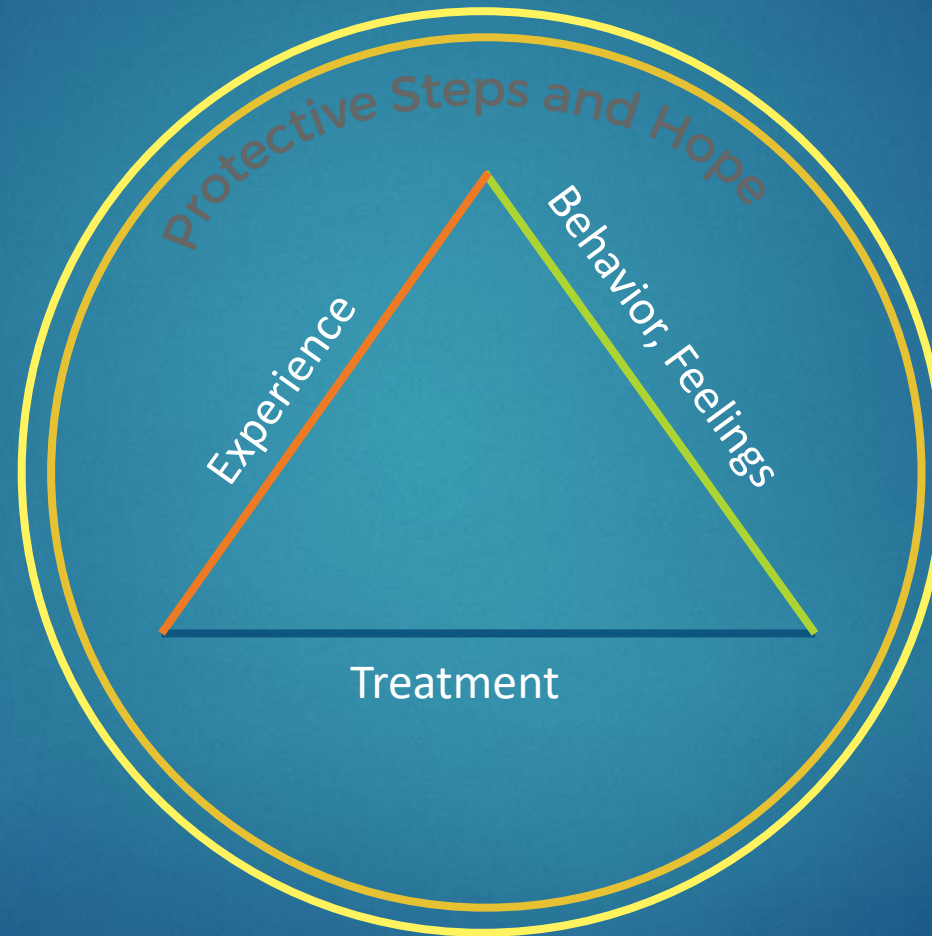
# CPP: Triangle of Explanations

## Protective Steps

Highlight when caregiver tried to help or created safety

## Experience

- You saw . . .
- You heard . . .



## Hope

Things can change for the better

## Behavior, Feelings

And now you . . .

## Treatment

This is a place where . . .

# The Honor of Hearing Your Story



# Suffering under the Rage



Serena Illustrations

# Holding a Historical Trauma Framework



- ▶ Experience: What has the family's cultural group been through?
- ▶ Behavior & Feelings
- ▶ Response to systems and service providers?
- ▶ Child socialization practices ?
- ▶ Responses to certain behaviors and emotions?
- ▶ Treatment: How will treatment acknowledge historical trauma and any ongoing impact on relationships and functioning?

# Restore the Protective Shield



- ▶ The caregiver has the rightful place as the child's guide through life and through this trauma
- ▶ We facilitate the caregiver's confident assumption of that role

# Holding Caregivers Benevolently



- ▶ Parents and caregivers need to ensure their children are protected from societal harm and racialized perception
- ▶ Their protective stance may be experienced by their own children as scary
- ▶ Translating the caregivers' benevolence to child as an important intervention

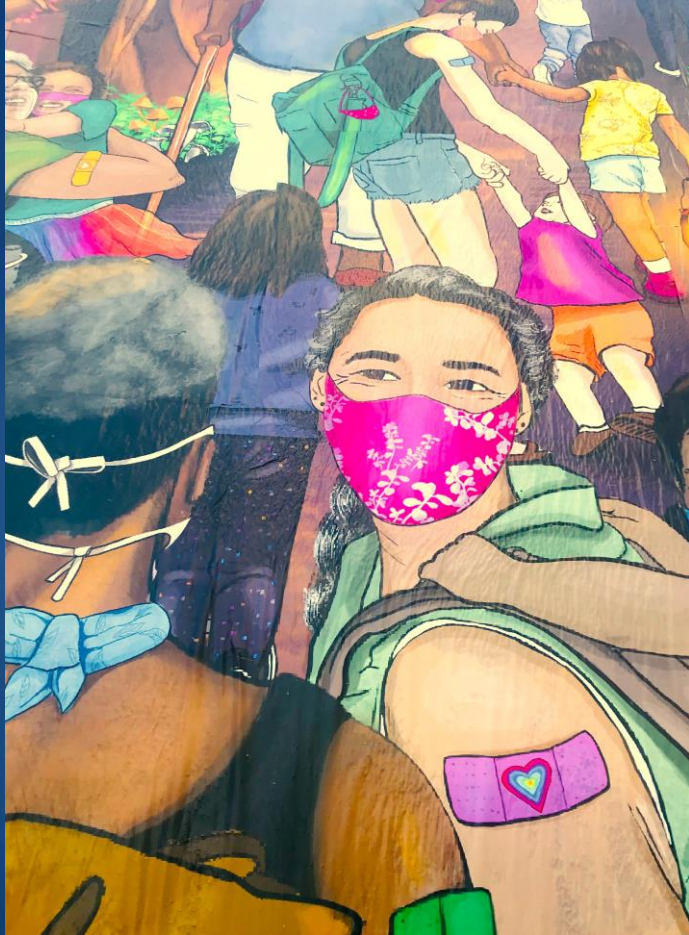
# Centering Reflection in our Day-to-Day Work



- ▶ Our organizations are not built for reflection
- ▶ Building the capacity for insight
  - ▶ Lot's of practice sitting with uncertainty and being able to calmly navigate through a storm and leaning into the discomfort of conflict
- ▶ Permission to stumble and get back up again



# Holding Hope



Rue Oliver

- ▶ What might healing look like in your community?
- ▶ What does healing-centered work environment look like in your organization?
- ▶ Centering reflection & relationship = key to healing and system change
- ▶ Invest early

# NEW FINDING: Child-Parent Psychotherapy reduces the impact of trauma on cellular aging



A new study examined **cellular aging** in two groups of children, aged 2 to 6 years, who all experienced trauma.



## Why study trauma and cellular aging?

Trauma exposure accelerates the normal process of cellular aging. **Epigenetic Age Acceleration (EAA)** is associated with greater health problems, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and stroke.



One group received **Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)**.

The comparison group did not.

## What is CPP?

**CPP is an attachment-based trauma treatment** for children under age 6 that promotes physical and emotional safety between child and caregiver. Extensive research shows that CPP results in improvements in child and caregiver mental health.



Children who received CPP had **lower Epigenetic Age Acceleration after treatment** compared to the no-treatment group.



## What does this finding mean?


The children who received **CPP** may be at lower risk for health problems later in life.

## TAKEAWAY

Invest early for better health. Treating early childhood trauma heals now and has the potential to improve physical health later.



# Intervening After Trauma: Child–Parent Psychotherapy Treatment Is Associated With Lower Pediatric Epigenetic Age Acceleration

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## Abstract

Early-life adversity increases the risk of health problems. Interventions supporting protective and responsive caregiving

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# Gratitude

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- ▶ My children for their lessons

Q & A