



# Trauma Informed De-escalation

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“Code green in the gym  
Code green in the gym.”



**POLICE REPORT:** On [date] I responded to [address] in reference to a domestic assault in progress. Upon arrival, I contacted [mother] who stated that I needed to remove her 16 year old son. I observed a broken door inside of the residence. Upon attempting to speak with the youth, he said not to touch him and started walking away toward the open doorway. He stated that he would talk outside and walked past me. Due to concern that he might run away, I attempted to detain the youth to conduct my investigation. He told me to remove my hands and shoved me away from him. I used my hands to create distance from him while I radioed for help. The youth continued to try to shove me away and did not otherwise try to escape. I pushed him away causing him to back into a wall, while I stated that he was going to jail, attempting to maintain hold of his wrist. I moved the youth to a sofa in the living room until I was able to place him in handcuffs.



### BARRY'S DESCRIPTION:

“I was mad at my mom because she was blaming me for something I didn’t do. What she said didn’t even happen, and my cousins were telling her that. She called the police on me. I just wanted to get out of there. I just wanna be on my own. I just want to be outside of Virginia. I want to have a life and leave all of this behind. My family is f\*\*\*ed up on both sides. But I wasn’t gonna run. If I was gonna run, I would’ve done it before the police showed up. The police officer came in. I said I want to talk to you but outside. I told him if I was going to run I would’ve run before you came. He just put his hands on me. Grabbed my arm from behind. With my past, I can’t handle when people do that. He pulled his taser on me. It wasn’t right.”







- History of trauma
- Trauma history impacted their perceptions and responses
- Maladaptive, reactive behavior
- Did not want it to go how it went!!!

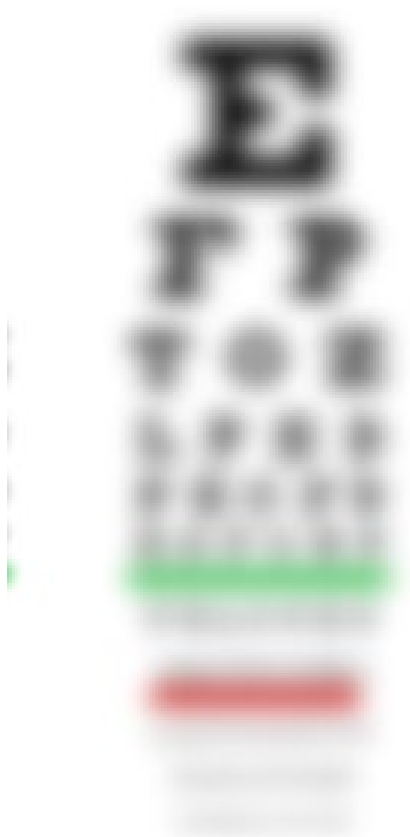


# DBHDS»» Similarities...adults' responses



- Defensible
- Focused on preserving safety
- Reactive
- Missed the role of trauma
- Did not de-escalate situation
- Made things worse for the kid
- Made things less safe





- Fear
- Confusion
- Panic
- Cognitive distortions
- Emotional distress



- Safety
- Engagement
- Perception of support
- Collaboration
- Alleviation of distress
- Rules are followed
- No one hurts anyone
- People listen to each other
- The situation settles with the least amount of difficulty



## How did trauma responses interfere with these outcomes?

- Behaviors were misinterpreted as willful noncompliance
- Distress was unappreciated
- Fear was seen as (anger, defiance, noncompliance...)



**What would be the possible or likely outcomes from**

Misinterpreting behavior as willful noncompliance?

Not appreciating distress?

Missing fear?

**What have you seen?**

# DBHDS Two things to remember about trauma

M  
I  
N  
D



B  
O  
D  
Y





# Distortion in threat perception

**We learn from threats without even trying**







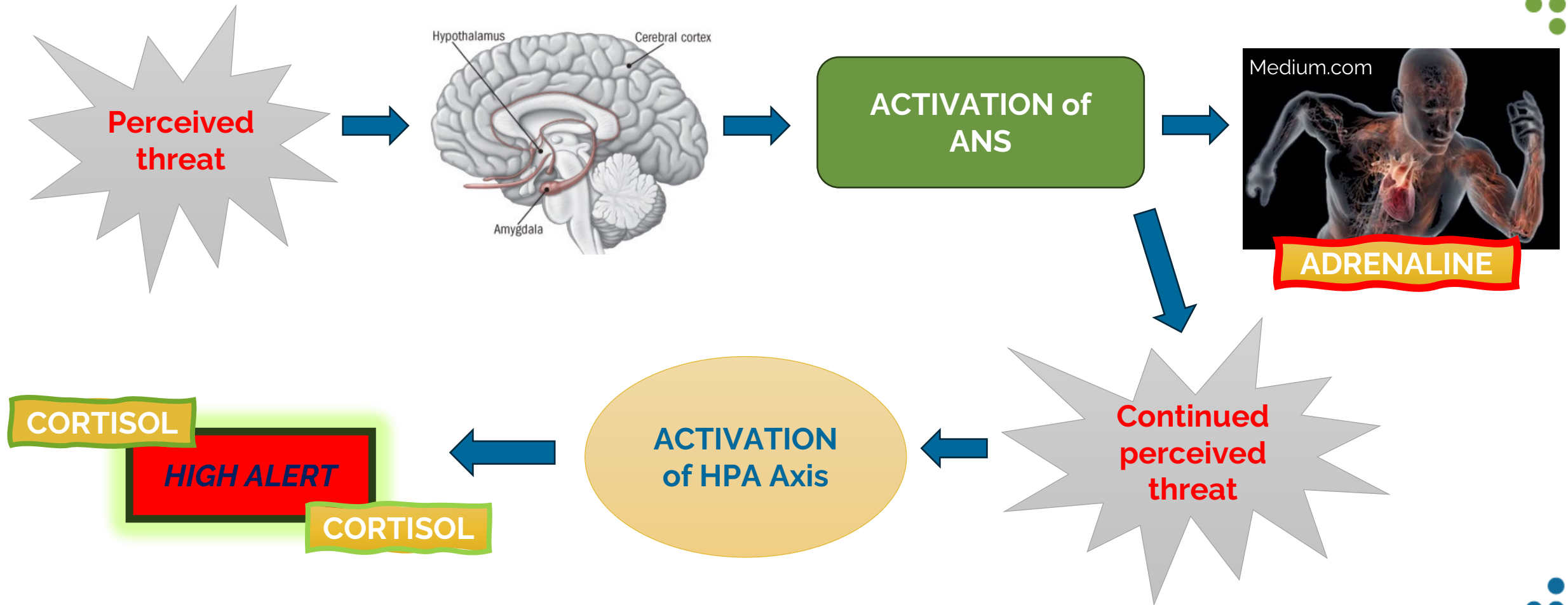
## Fears persist ...and generalize

➤ Better safe than sorry

# DBHDS >>> Mind: Distortion in threat perception

- PTSD: Hypervigilance; increased startle response
- “I feel like I’m always on point.”
- When you least expect it, expect it.
- Always ready for an attack...
- ...Always ready for a fight?





AKA

SURVIVAL

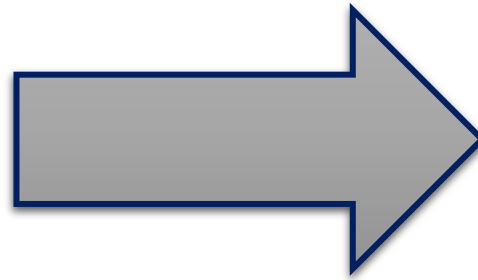
FIGHT

FLIGHT

*FREEZE*

# Automatic Response

IF A



THEN  
B

# DBHDS >>> Helpful (De-escalating) Responses



1. Assume a trauma history
2. Be mindful of possible triggers
3. Slow things down (breathe)
4. Reflect feelings (de-emphasize behaviors)
5. Explain (tell before, give reasons)
6. Give choices and control
7. Emphasize safety

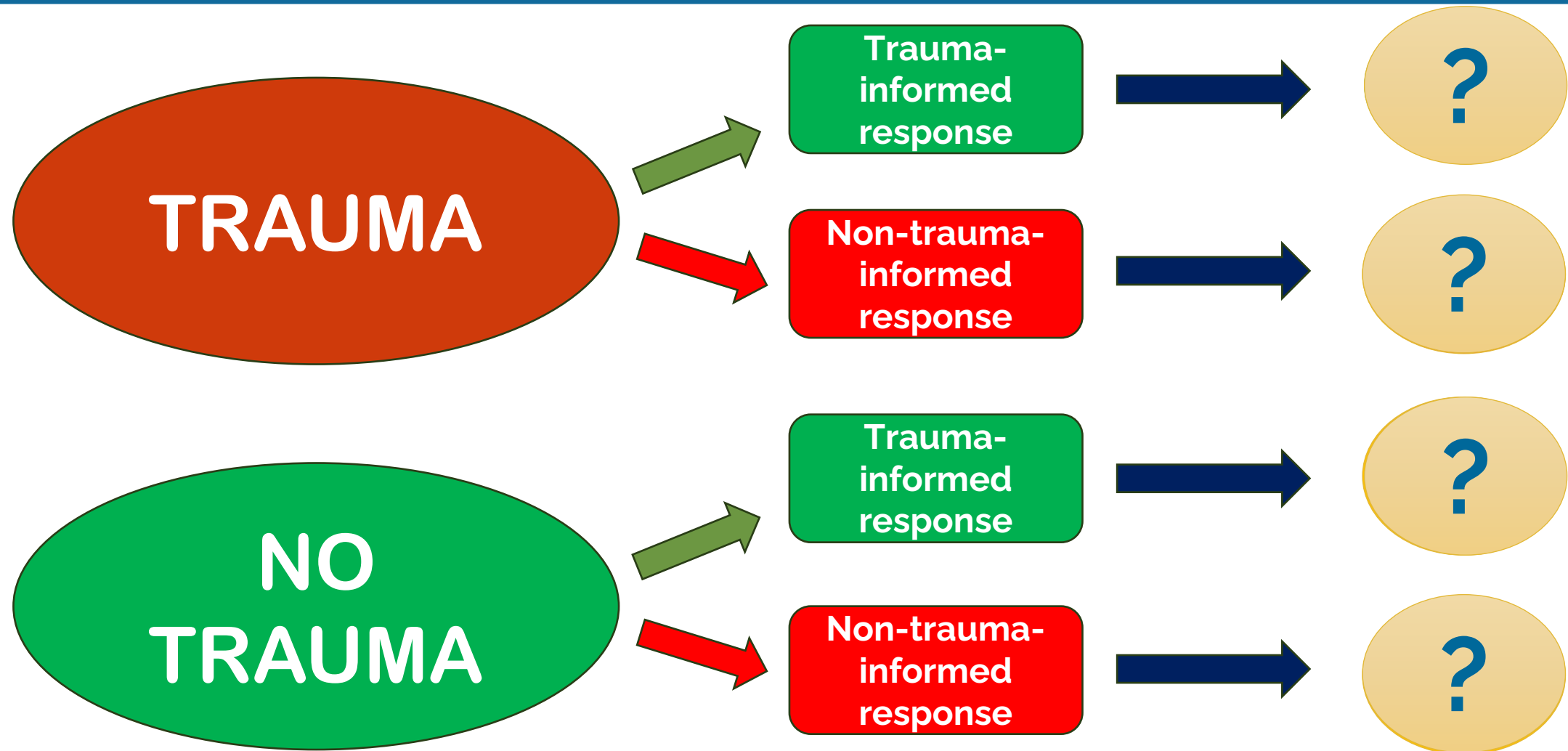


# DBHDS >>> Unhelpful (Escalating) Responses



1. Focus on compliance
2. Be authoritarian
3. Get too close
4. Be loud
5. Speed things up
6. Interpret fear and anxiety as willful defiance









## What might activate trauma responses?

- Physical proximity
- Loud noise
- Tone of voice
- Time of day
- Nature of the environment
- Smells
- ...
- Your size
- Your gender
- Who you look like
- Your uniform
- Your authority
- Your resting face
- ...

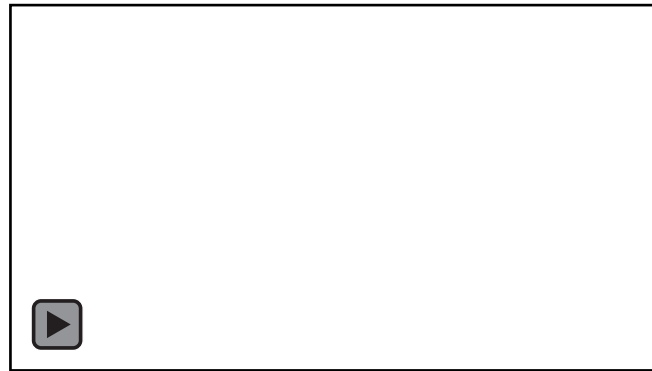




When trauma a response is activated...

Things speed up

Thinking slows down

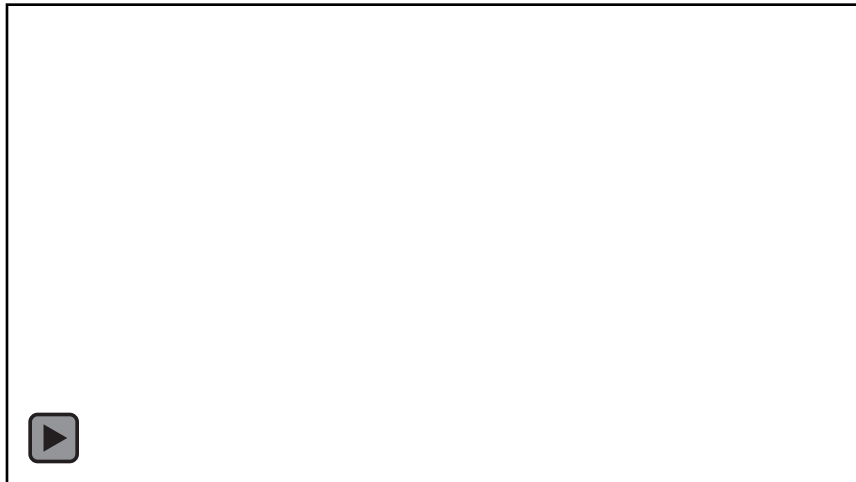




Breathe

Speak more slowly

Engage thinking



## Active/Reflective Listening

**I'M TIRED OF  
THIS S--T!!!!**

- Hear what is behind what is being said
- Reflect it back
- Convey understanding, not judgment
- Resist offering a solution (...at least at first)

REFLECTION

CLARIFICATION

NTAL



# Decrease uncertainty and confusion

- Explain what you are asking and why
- Explain what you are doing and why
  - Explain what is going to happen
  - ...even if it seems obvious to you





“How can I help?”

“What do you need?”

“Tell me what you want to see happen.”

“Do you want to do it (this way) or (that way)?”



I'm  
here  
to  
help



~~I'm  
here  
because  
of  
your  
behavior~~



## Exercise





## DBHDS >>> Helpful (De-escalating) Responses



“When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don’t blame the lettuce. You look for reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce. Yet if we have problems with our friends or family, we blame the other person. But if we know how to take care of them, they will grow well, like the lettuce. Blaming has no positive effect at all, nor does trying to persuade using reason and argument. That is my experience. No blame, no reasoning, no argument, just understanding.”

Thích Nhất Hạnh

