

# Supporting Youth Mental Health During Uncertainty: What Parents and Educators Should Know & How They Can Help

Nancy Burgoyne, Ph.D.  
Chief Clinical Officer

&

Smita Gautam, MD  
Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist

The Family Institute at Northwestern University

# Youth Mental Health



# Indicators of positive mental health are present in most children

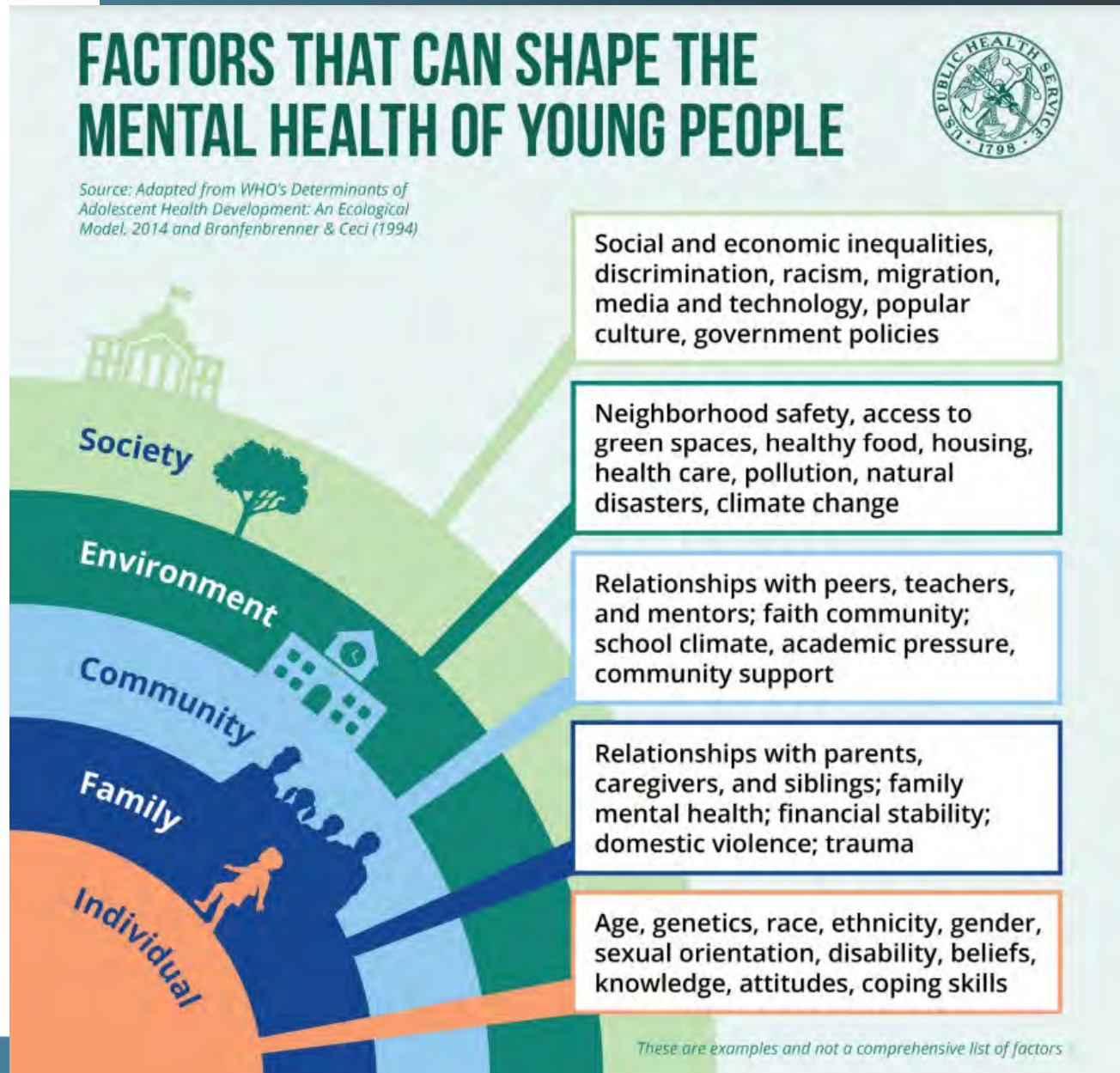
According to the [CCD \(2019\)](#), parents reported in 2016-2019 that their child mostly or always showed:

- Affection (97.0%), resilience (87.9%), positivity (98.7%) and curiosity (93.9%) among children ages 3-5 years
- Curiosity (93.0%), persistence (84.2%), and self-control (73.8%) among children ages 6-11 years
- Curiosity (86.5 %), persistence (84.7%), and self-control (79.8%) among children ages 12-17 years

# Youth mental health crisis

- According to a [2021 JAMA Pediatrics](#) meta-analysis, **globally**, pooled estimates obtained in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that 1 in 4 youth are experiencing clinically elevated depression symptoms, while 1 in 5 youth are experiencing clinically elevated anxiety symptoms. These pooled estimates, are *double* of pre-pandemic estimates.
- According to the [American Psychological Association](#) (2022), **in the U.S.** mental health problems are pervasive and profoundly affect children's education, safety, and futures.
  - The [suicide rate in the U.S. is the highest](#) among wealthy nations, and data suggest that 1 in 5 young women (and 1 in 10 young men) experience a clinical episode of major depression before age 25.. Suicide is now the [second leading cause of death](#) among 10- to 24-year-olds.
  - Nearly HALF (46%) of school-aged youth currently between 13-18 years old have experienced a diagnosable mental illness at some point in their lives (Kern et al, 2017).

## Protecting Youth Mental Health U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2021



# Interacting factors impacting youth mental health\*

- Environmental factors
  - [Community violence](#), [climate change](#), [social “spillover”](#), [Covid Pandemic](#)
  - [Endocrine disruptors](#) (hormones impacting age of pubertal onset)
- [Increased academic demands / stress](#)
- [Sleep restriction](#), direct & indirect impact of [reduced physical activity](#)
- Covid amplified sense of [uncertainty about the future](#)
- Social & economic inequality (e.g., [Poverty](#), [Minority stress](#))
- Impact of digital technologies, [social media](#) (amplifying effect?)
- [Parent Stress](#) & Health. Over 40% of US adults have reported clinically significant symptoms of Anxiety or Depression during the pandemic . A 3-4x increase over 2019. (U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey 2020-2021)
- Others?

*\*not rank ordered*

# Impact of Chronic Stress

Chronically heightened **allostatic load** (the cumulative burden of chronic stress and life events) negatively impacts mood, cognitive functioning, sleep, and physical health ([source](#))



# Supporting Health & Growth During Stressful Times

- Self care
- Building Resilience
- Post-Traumatic Growth



# Self Care through self-reflection

- What are currently your biggest “required expenditures” of energy/time?
- What are your best energy “investments”? Do they pay you back?
- What are some optional expenditures that are rarely worth the cost?
- What self-care practices serve to “discount” your other energy expenditures?
- What habits or stressors serve to “tax” your other energy expenditures?

\*Credit to Drs. Lisa Feldman Barrett & Caroline Adelman

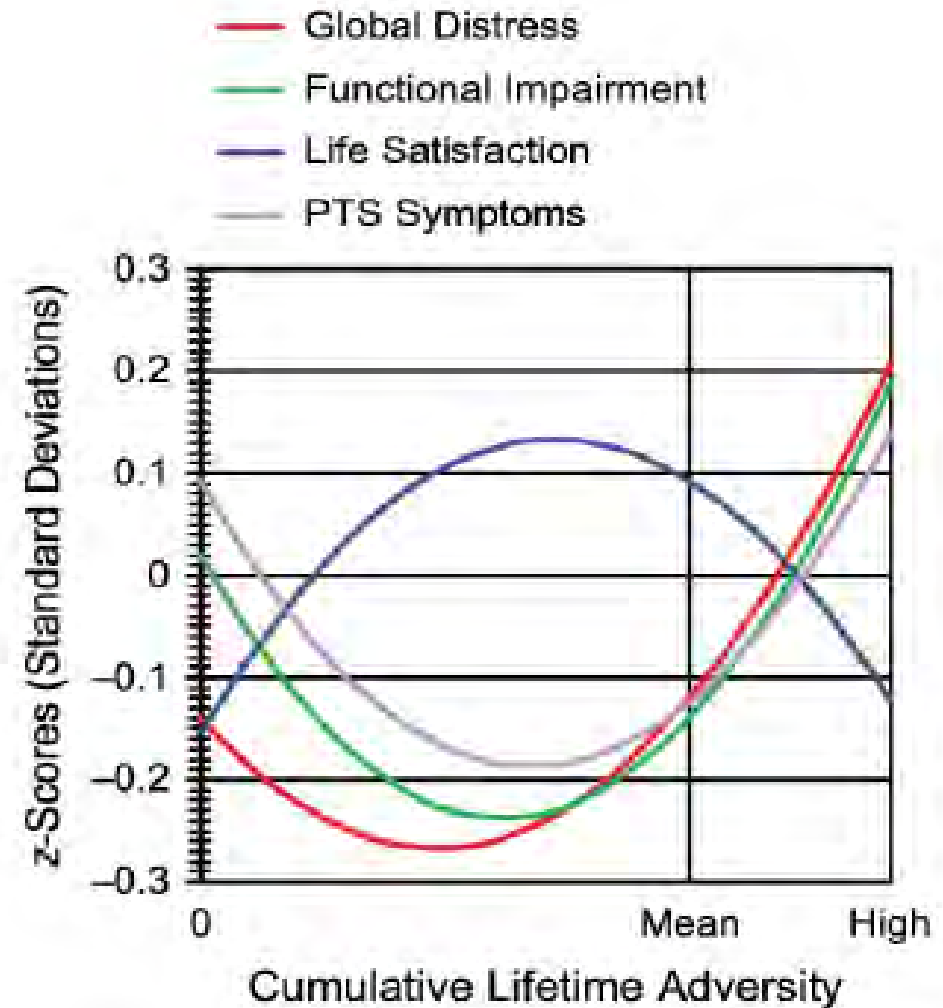
# Building Resilience: Core Components

- Connection
- Meaning making
- Balanced Thinking
- Wellness



# Capacity for resilience should not be exploited

- Adversity is both a stressor and an opportunity for skill development
- U-shaped relationship between experiences of adversity and development of resilience over time

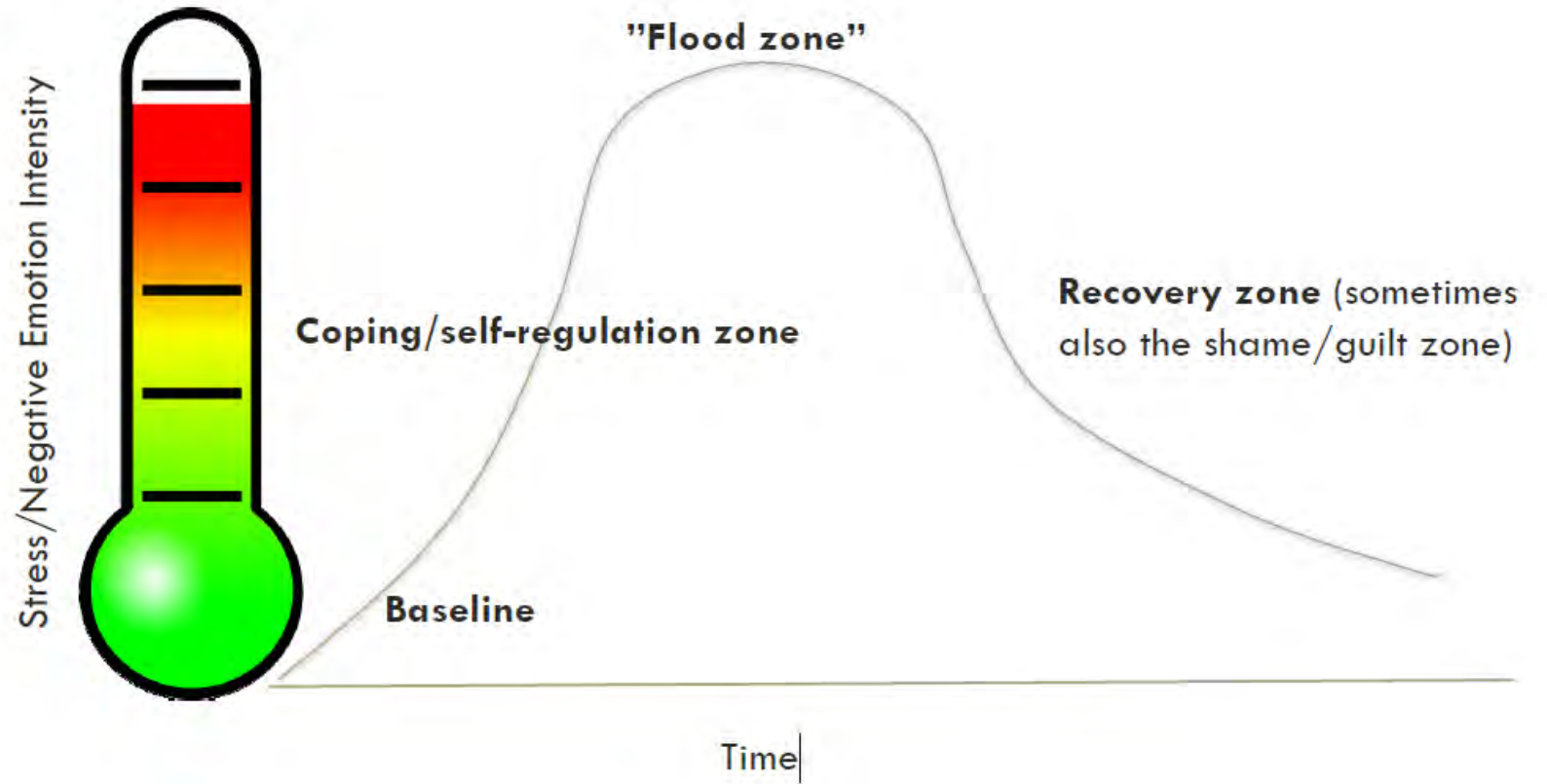


(Seery, M. 2011)

# Supporting (Post Traumatic) Growth

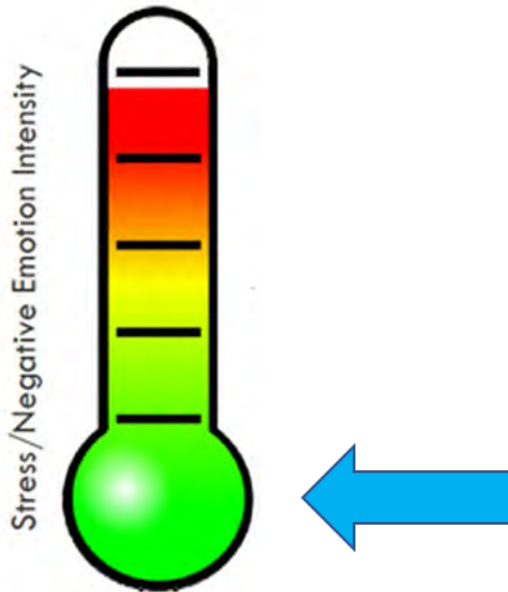
- Meaning making
  - Turn our energy and attention to what we are living **for**, not just what we are living **through**.
  - Attend to the stories you tell yourself and ways in which you view the world around you (e.g., perspective, locus of control, active vs passive stance)
  - Practice acceptance, self-compassion, and **compassion** for others
- Increase value –driven actions
  - What do I really care about?
  - How do I actualize my values without damaging my relationships?
- FOCUS ON STRENGTHS. *What you pay attention to grows.*
- Diversify your response based on where you or your child are at in the emotion cycle\*

Different skills  
are key during  
different  
phases of the  
emotion cycle



(Caroline Adelman, PhD, 2022)

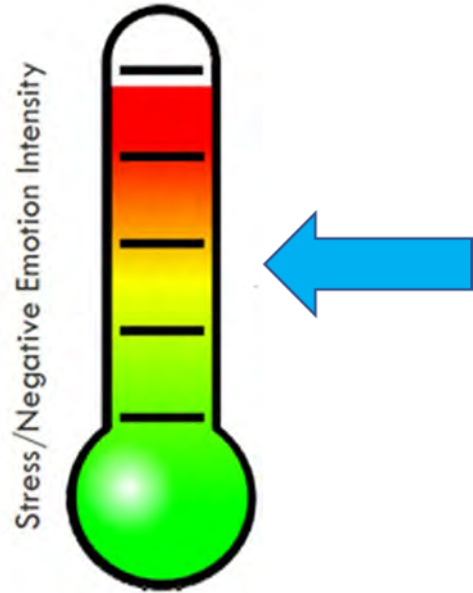
# Baseline



## Strengthen your foundation & bond

- Family routines and rituals (e.g., dinnertime)
- Affection matters
- Be curious about your kids
- Listen and reflect back
- Check in ... even if you get one-word responses
- Monitor their whereabouts
- EXPAND your focus beyond school / achieving

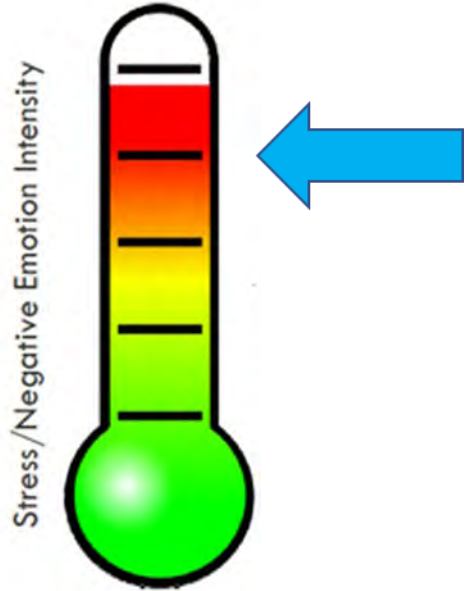
# Coping & Regulating



- Slow Down
- Simplify
- Stay Present

\*Maru Torres-Gregory, PhD

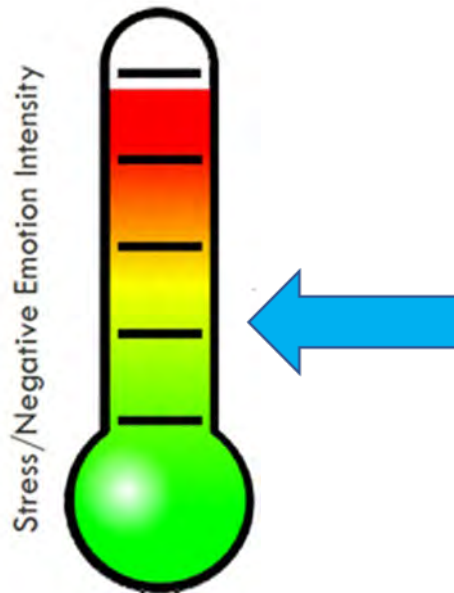
# Flood Zone



- DO NOT ENGAGE ANY CONTENT
- Work a go to list of things that calm the nervous system
  - Cold water / ice
  - Go outside
  - Cry
  - Diaphragmatic breathing



# Post Flood Coping & Recovery



- Post flood is an extremely vulnerable time for a person and their relationships. Most people are flooded with shame, typically hidden defensiveness.
  - You can say “I am here & I love you” without saying “it’s okay”
  - Take time to gently recognize what was done well and explore what might help going forward

# Connection at school is impactful

According to the [2021 Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey](#):

- Compared with those who did not feel close to persons at school, students who felt close to persons at school had a significantly lower prevalence of poor mental health during the pandemic (28.4% versus 45.2%) and during the past 30 days (23.5% versus 37.8%), persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness (35.4% versus 52.9%), having seriously considered attempting suicide (14.0% versus 25.6%), and having attempted suicide (5.8% versus 11.9%).
- The same pattern was observed among students who were virtually connected to others during the pandemic (i.e., with family, friends, or other groups by using a computer, telephone, or other device) versus those who were not.



What is most protective for youth's mental health?



A relationship with a well regulated, *attuned* adult.



# Resource

## The Family Institute's Talking to Kids you Love Video Series

Strengthen the bond with your children  
Build their emotional intelligence  
Promote their self-esteem

Questions?

