

# The Mixed Bag: Attachment, Trauma & Adoption

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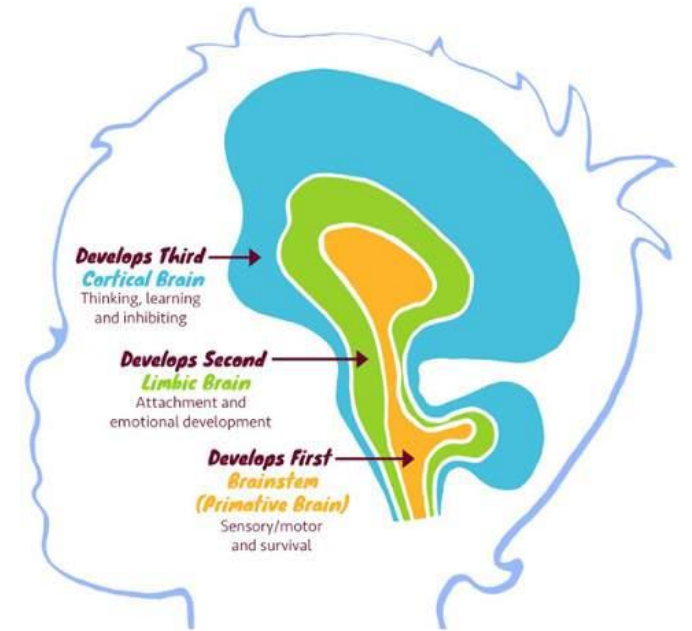


# Regional Post Adoption Consortium Services

- Grant Funded by Virginia Department of Social Services
- Any adoptive family living in Virginia with finalized adoption and youth 17 or under is eligible
- Provides array of services that can be determined by family:
  - Resource & Referral
  - Case Management
  - Support Groups
  - Family Events
  - Education & Training
  - Crisis Planning
  - Parent Coaching with LCSW clinician (open RPACS families with documented need)
- Services are provided at no cost to families

# TRAUMA & BRAIN

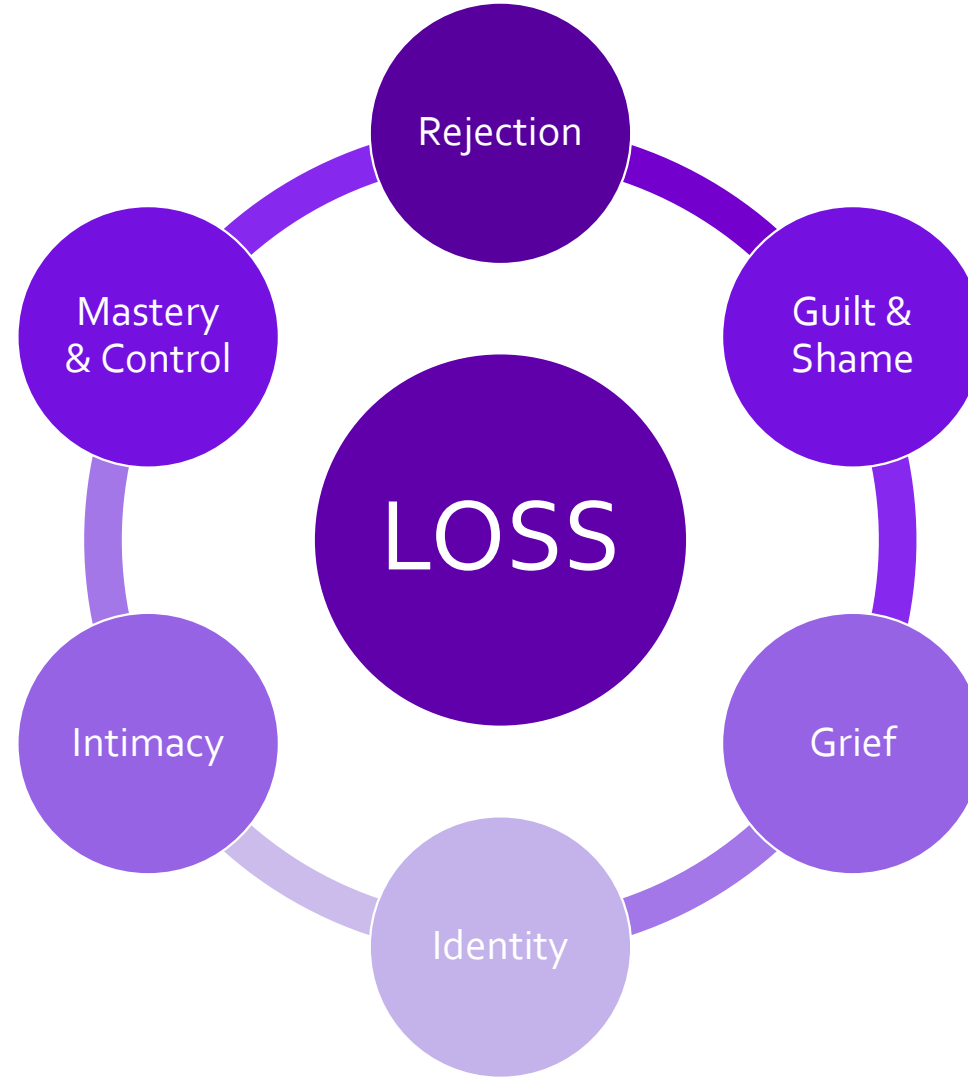
- The brain is uniquely designed to survive the world the child lives in
- Pathways used frequently get stronger and pathways use less frequently get weaker
- Anything that interrupts development will affect the parts of the brain that are developing at that time
- Children who experience complex developmental trauma and toxic stress often have brains with a narrow window of tolerance and an exaggerated fear response – hyper or hypo arousal.



↑ Children's brains develop from the bottom up. ↑

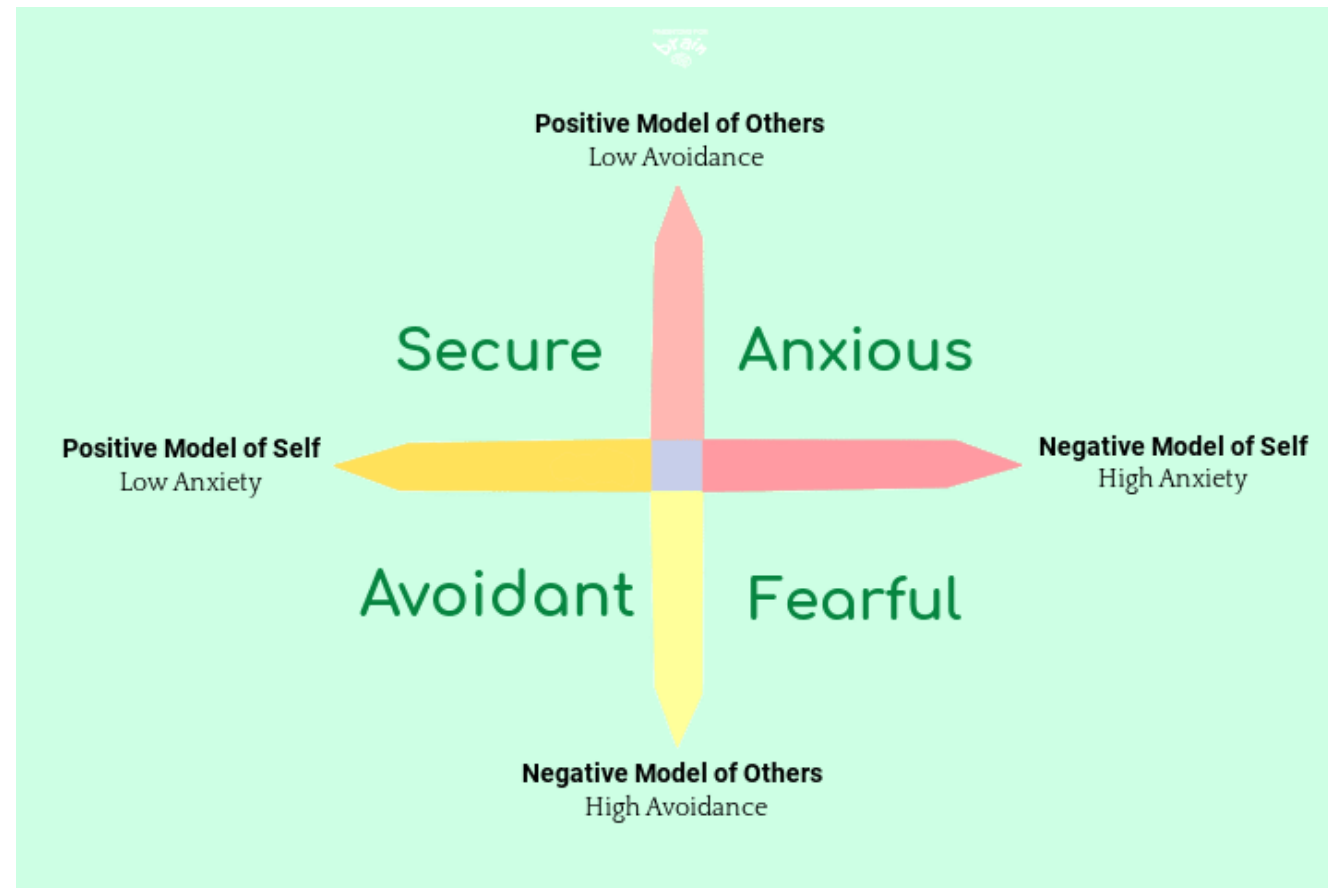
# 7 CORE ISSUES

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Allison Davis Maxon

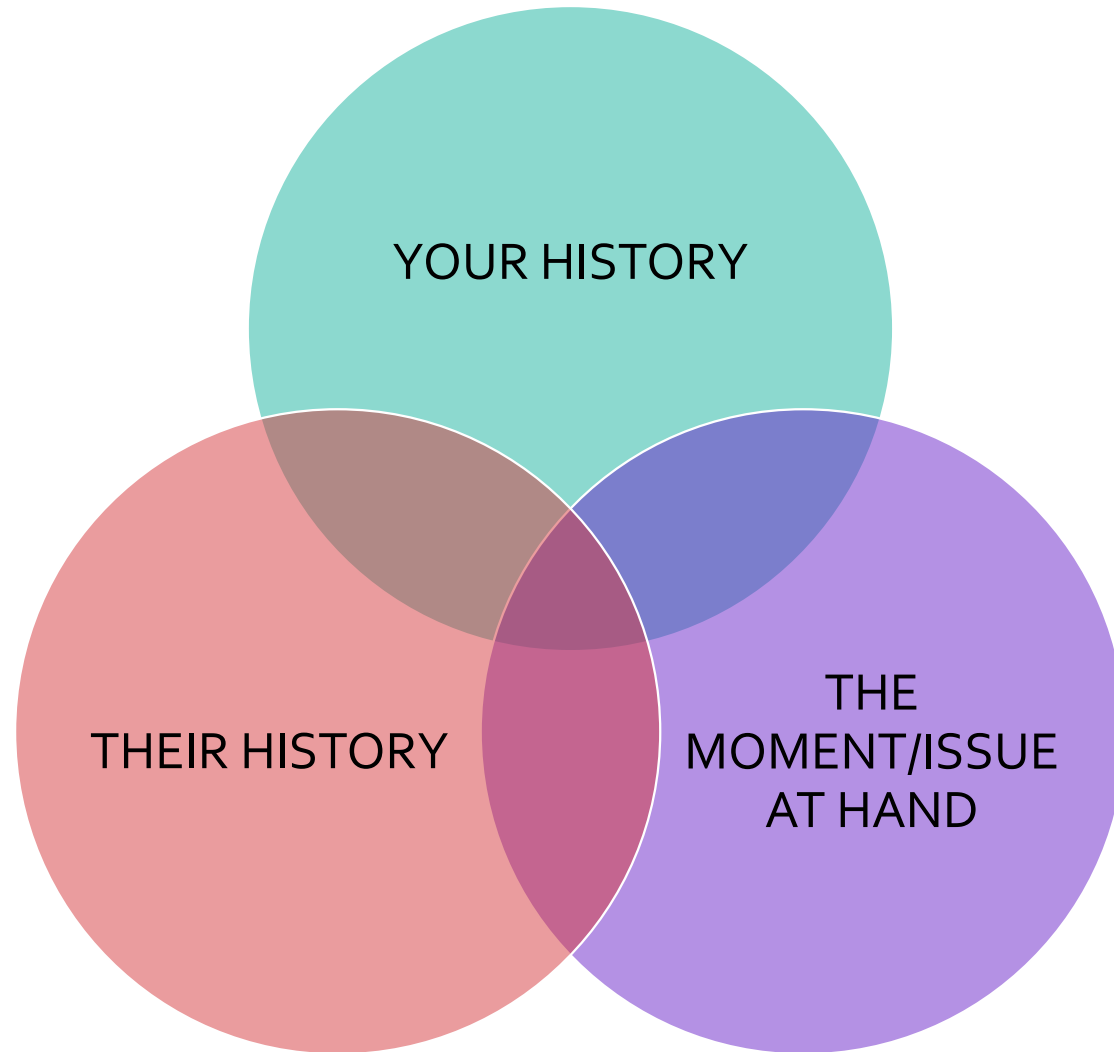


# ATTACHMENT

- Is a shared interactive experience BETWEEN people
  - Is not housed inside of 'one person'
  - Prior & concurrent relationships/experiences inform



Attachment  
Remix:  
What is  
happening in  
relationship  
interactions?

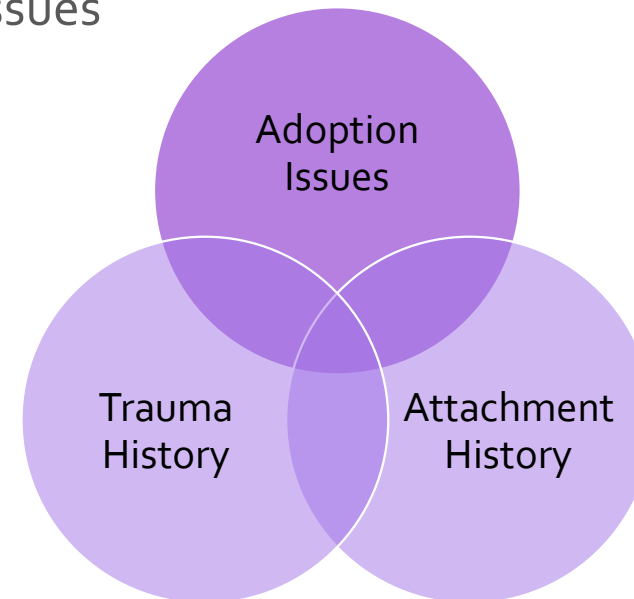


## Needs & Barriers

- Adoption is NOT a diagnosis
- Lack of psychosocial history is a barrier to accurate diagnosis & services
- Services and insurance models that are targeted to youth “identified client” only
- Lack of parent involvement or lack of funding for parent specific treatment
- Increased need for body based / somatic approaches that do not rely solely on talking
- Attachment cannot be addressed solely through individual therapy to a child. It requires a caregiver or attachment relationship. And it requires that the adult is in the lead doing the most work.
- Medication management can be a helpful part of treatment, but it cannot be an exclusive intervention. There is NO medication for attachment disorder.

# Challenges for Assessment

- Executive function blowout
- Evaluating mental health solely on CURRENT observable behaviors
- Lack of in-depth history, often lacking in-utero
- Many diagnosis mimic or overlap each other
- Complex Developmental Trauma always best explainer but not option in DSM
- Intersections of issues





# ASSESSMENT: Evaluations

- Neuropsychological
- Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT)
- Sensory evaluations with trauma-informed Occupation Therapist (OT)
- ALWAYS make sure that a COMPREHENSIVE history is part of evaluation including in-utero.
  - Include both what may be documented but also what is suspected or known through conversation
  - At intake are you asking “How did this child join your family?” Birth, adoption, foster care, kinship?

# ASSESSMENT: Gathering History

- Child/youth's history
- Parent's history
- Circumstances and experiences specific to placement
  - How did family come to the decision to be a foster, adoption or kinship family?
  - What were the experiences between the parent and child in the initial period (few days, then few months, then first 6 months)
  - How has the relationship shifted or changed with time? Co-occurring circumstances?
    - Onset of adolescence
    - Parent becoming increasingly frustrated/detached
    - New traumatic experiences for child
    - Changes (moves, divorce, etc.)

# TREATMENT OPTIONS

- Therapy that works with the entire family, particularly focused on parent strategies to manage day to day regulation
- Working with parent to support their own emotional well-being and regulation. Identification of their own triggers around fight, flight and freeze based on their own attachment history and experience with the child.
- Trauma specific treatment modalities that work with youth and rely on strategies outside of talk therapy.
  - Movement & Play
  - Neurofeedback
  - EMDR
  - TF-CBT
  - Sensory based OT
  - Safe & Sound Protocol
  - Theraplay<sup>®</sup>
  - Narrative Therapies

# RESOURCES

- Regional Post Adoption Consortium Services
  - [VDSS search by locality](#)
- Local Public Mental Health
- Support networks for parents – Support groups, apps, etc.
- Talk to us about more in depth trainings!
  - RPACS [dpurgold@umfs.org](mailto:dpurgold@umfs.org)
  - C2Adopt Trainings [jsurratt@c2adopt.org](mailto:jsurratt@c2adopt.org)