

# **Playing to Heal: A Trauma-Sensitive Sports Practice**

2017 BOOST Conference



# Today's Goals

- Understanding the basic story of trauma and sports environments
- Try on a different approach to working with kids and building programs
- Workshop and learn strategies for trauma-sensitive program design
- Potentially lead to questions – but that's okay! That's actually the goal.

# Meet 20!

- **Your Goal:** Meet as many people in the room as possible in 9 minutes!
- When the time starts, find a partner and make sure each person gets to answer the question that will be posted on the screen.
- Once you've answered that question, say farewell to your partner and find a new pair.
- Repeat – using whatever question is up on the screen – until we call time!

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## Question 1

What kind of program are you from?

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## Question 2

Why are you interested in trauma-sensitive work?

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## Question 3

In your opinion, what makes sport such a great learning environment?

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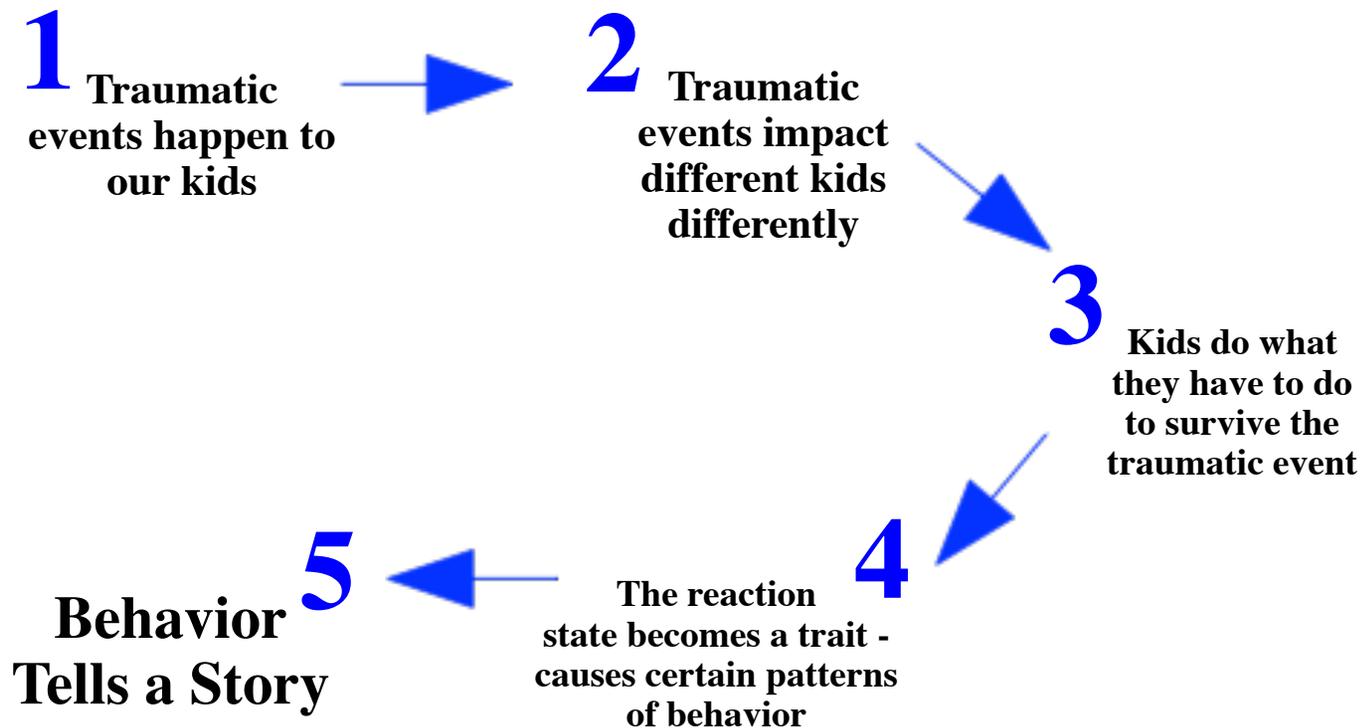
# Trauma in Our Community

- Our definition or common understanding of trauma needs to be broadened.
- Trauma impacts more youth than we think- many of the youth we work with are suffering. That suffering may keep them from being able to fully engage in our programs.

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# Story of Trauma



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# Behavior Tells a Story

What a child would tell us if they could:

- *I did everything I could to survive.*
- *It's not my choice to behave the way I do.*
- *I am trying so hard, and this behavior you see is potentially the BEST I CAN DO.*

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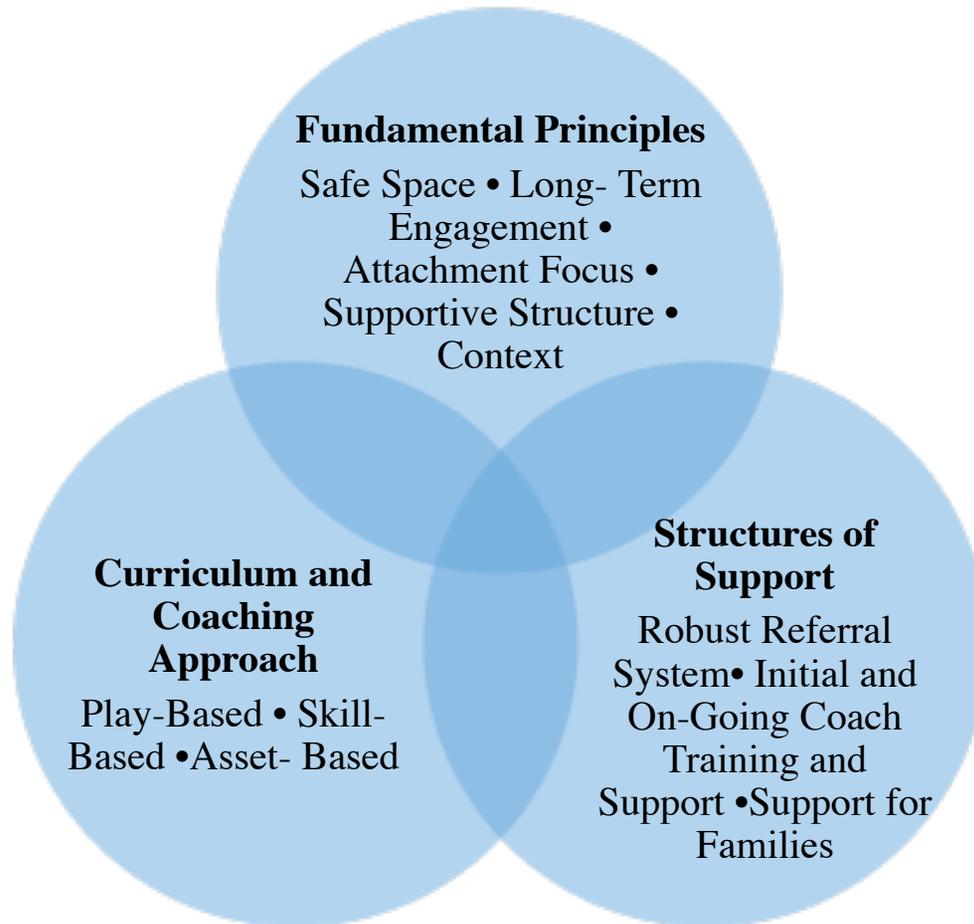
# A Time-Out about Sports

Sports can hurt  
**AND**  
Sports can heal

# A Trauma-Sensitive Program

- Understands that challenging behavior is often not an issue of “will”
- Understands that if it can bend itself towards these kids, it will retain them longer and be able to have more impact (The Positive Path)
- Decouples itself from the way the sport is played “out there” and does whatever it can to get its version of sport just right for its players

# Trauma-Sensitive Framework



# Program Design - Domains

1. Physical environment
2. Transitions into/out of program
3. Roles
4. Rules
5. CHOICE

# What's Next?

- Incremental Change
- Small Change, Big Impact!
  
- Network of Resources
- Us, You!

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believes that sports are uniquely suited to address trauma in youth, when applied in the correct way. Below are some of the reasons sports in an effective tool to address adverse childhood experiences:



### HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

Coaches can create a physical space that is structured and consistent, where participants know what to expect and feel safe.



### SEASONS OF PLAY

Sports inherently have a cycle, which makes participants take a future focus. They can lose a big game and get back to practice.



### COMPETENCY BUILDING

Participants feel empowered when they can try something new, get feedback and watch themselves get better. In sports, this often happens in a short amount of time.



### PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE

Participants have positive experiences with their bodies. They learn to regulate things like their breathing, heart rate and the tension in their muscles.



### PEOPLE FOCUS

Relationships with coaches and teammates can be made into a positive and protective mechanism.



### IMMERSIVE & ENGAGING

The intensity of sports makes participants focus on the present, instead of past trauma.



### SAFE STRESS

Sports have real stress and real stakes in a safe environment.



### DECISION MAKING

Sports fosters autonomy. Participants have the chance to practice making decisions, without fear of dire consequences.

**EDGE WORK** A collaborative project with Edgework Consulting



# A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SPORTS PRACTICE



## TRANSITION

A good transition starts at least 30 minutes before practice is going to start. Players are given time and space to adjust to their new context. A transition lays the groundwork for safety because it is consistent and youth-directed. Transitions help start players down the pathway to being present.

### SPACE

Coaches set the space up in a consistent way so players know what to expect and gives them options to choose from to help facilitate their transition.

### INTERACTIONS

Coaches create opportunities for informal connection by setting up optional collaborative activities and offering high-fives, handshakes, light inquiries, and check-ins.

### RITUALS

Kids are in charge of how they use their time, but coaches offer consistent markers or countdowns to help kids stay oriented towards what's ahead.



## WARM-UP

A trauma-sensitive warm-up routine helps the team and each individual player get ready by engaging in consistent activities that include choice elements. It's a time for players to get oriented towards their bodies and the good and bad stress of the day.

### CHECK IN

Coaches facilitate reflection for players about how they are feeling, what's happening in their bodies and what to expect for the day.

### WARM-UP ACTIVITIES

Coaches design an active team routine in which the experience becomes centered around the body and help players identify the things they need to do as individuals to get themselves ready.

### HUDDLE UP

Coaches share the expectations of the day and work with players to identify and prepare for potential moments of bad stress.



## PLAY

During the "play" phase, coaches help players gain and maintain competence, control, and positive connections. They manipulate activities and the environment to help every kid "get a win" and try and string those wins together so that they get on a "hot streak."

### BRIDGE

Coaches build competence by recognizing small accomplishments and using the momentum to engage in the next activity.

### BOOST

Anticipating when a player might get off track, coaches offer an opportunity for players to reset and get another win.

### BREAK

Coaches offer the chance for players to opt out of bad stress (wherever that may be) by calling their own time out, adopting a mistake ritual, or going to the "reset" zone where a player can work on fundamentals until they get back to good stress.



## COOL DOWN

The cool down phase acknowledges that it takes a while to reset the body after being active. It gives ownership of this resetting process to the players and helps them prepare for the upcoming transition (which may be to a less safe space).

### ENDING TRADITION

Coaches offer a game or scrimmage that is always a marker for practice approaching its close and helps kids leave on a high note.

### COOL DOWN

Coaches design an active team routine in which the experience becomes centered around the body (how to take ownership over decreasing the heart rate) and help players identify the things they need to do as individuals to get themselves ready to transition.

### TEAM TIME

Coaches facilitate a consistent conversation where players get to connect with each other and talk about whatever they want to share.



## TRANSITION

A good transition lasts for at least 30 minutes. It reinforces the safety of the space by allowing players enough time to manage the close of practice and prepare for what comes next.

### SPACE

Coaches stay in the room and leave equipment out for any player who wants to "play out" some lingering part of the game.

### INTERACTIONS

Coaches remain available for informal interactions or intentional interventions with players who might benefit from more help moving on to the next thing.

### RITUALS

Kids are in charge of how they use their time, but coaches offer consistent markers or countdowns to help kids stay oriented towards what's ahead.

## DNA OF A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE COACH

### THINKS

1. Considers each player as an individual with unique strengths and a different tolerance for stress.
2. Understands the science of the brain and how it can impact a child's behavior before assigning blame.

### BELIEVES

1. In the power of sports to heal - that the presence of a caring coach, supportive teammates, and physical activity can be protective.
2. All kids are doing the best that they can do given their unique contexts.
3. A player's progress is not linear and requires time, patience and care.

### DOES

1. Creates a deeply safe space where kids are protected enough to take risks.
2. Helps players recognize and own their progress as they build skills.
3. Provides opportunities for kids to have choice over their experience.

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With so much research emerging about the physical components of trauma recovery and new investment in creating trauma-sensitive environments, Up2Us Sports is committed to reimagining youth sports as part of the solution for all young people, especially those living in urban underserved communities. Up2Us Sports works in two ways:

#### TRAIN COACHES IN TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

We train coaches to create trauma-sensitive sports experiences that give young people the space and time to heal.

#### SUPPORT YOUTH SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS

We support youth sports organizations as they develop strong referral networks that link their participants and families to core community resources outside of sport.

Trauma-sensitive coaches know that their sport programs, combined with networks of allies, can help keep one more kid on a positive path for one more day.