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& Wellbeing

Getting a good early start: supporting attachment relationships in young children and stressed parents

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Some of our team



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Scottish Attachment in Action



#InternationalWomensDay



Humans are pack animals





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A pack is made up of
attachment relationships – with
people of all ages





Attachment starts with the baby seeking help



**Its all about soothing
and stress calibration**



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Then the relationship develops
through “serve and return”



**The baby serves
(*attachment
behaviours*)...and the
caregiver returns
(*caregiving
behaviours*)**



Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

**This is basic human
instinct and is easy
when nothing is
getting in the way**



Why is stress calibration so important?

Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews 35 (2011) 1562–1592



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/neubiorev

Review

The Adaptive Calibration Model of stress responsivity

Marco Del Giudice^{a,*}, Bruce J. Ellis^b, Elizabeth A. Shirtcliff^c

“children have evolved ... to respond in biologically adaptive ways to harsh and unsupportive family environments, not just to loving and supportive ones”



Why is stress calibration so important?

**Optimum
functioning
“flow”** →

**Sluggish
sleepy** →





Why is stress calibration so important?



Fight, flight, freeze



- **Car accident**
- **Death of a loved one**
- **Shouted at by your boss**



Why is stress calibration so important?

Relaxation, restitution ←



Fight, flight, freeze





Why is stress calibration so important?

Relaxation, restitution



Fight, flight, freeze





Why is stress calibration so important?

Relaxation, restitution ←



Fight, flight, freeze





Why is stress calibration so important?

Relaxation, restitution



Fight, flight, freeze





Why is stress calibration so important?

Relaxation, restitution ←



Fight, flight, freeze





Why is stress calibration so important?

Relaxation, restitution ↔ **Fight, flight, freeze**



↓
Healthy development, robust to challenges



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We learn to manage our own
stress calibration throughout life

Relaxation, restitution \longleftrightarrow Fight, flight, freeze



↓
Healthy development, robust to challenges

Gunnar



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Helped by the quality of
relationships in our pack





But what if your calibration is usually in the “red zone”?



**Overwhelmed
Agitated
Brain-freeze**

**Rage
Withdrawal
Self-harm or suicide**



Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)

Failure to seek and accept
comfort; excessively inhibited,
hypervigilant or highly ambivalent
and contradictory responses

*...with a history of abuse and/or
neglect*





Disinhibited Social Engagement Disorder (DSED)

indiscriminate sociability with marked inability to exhibit appropriate selective attachments

...with a history of abuse and/or neglect





RAD and DSED are thought to be the only disorders specifically caused by maltreatment...although don't forget PTSD



BRITISH JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY (2007), 190, 490–495. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.105.019745

Genetic, environmental and gender influences on attachment disorder behaviours

HELEN MINNIS, JOANNE REEKIE, DAVID YOUNG, TOM O'CONNOR,
ANGELICA RONALD, ALISON GRAY and ROBERT PLOMIN

Twin study

The degree of similarity in symptoms was compared between identical and non-identical twins.

The closer the similarity in identical twins, the more heritable the disorder -especially if there is more similarity between identical compared to non-identical



Table 3 Estimates from the ACE model based on the Relationship Problems Questionnaire and its 'inhibited' and 'disinhibited' sub-scales

	Males (n=4474) % (95% CI)	Females (n=4706) % (95% CI)
Reactive Attachment Disorder		
Additive genetic	64.5 (57.2–72.4)	21.9 (16.8–27.7)
Shared environment	24.3 (16.4–31.6)	62.2 (57.0–67.0)
Non-shared environment	11.2 (10.15–12.32)	15.9 (14.5–17.4)
Disinhibited Social Engagement Disorder		
Additive genetic	77.0 (69.2–85.5)	54.8 (48.5–61.7)
Shared environment	14.9 (6.4–22.7)	36.4 (29.4–42.8)
Non-shared environment	8.1 (7.4–9.0)	8.8 (8.0–9.7)

RPQ, Relationship Problems Questionnaire.

What's inherited?



Could it be temperament?





Could it be neurodevelopmental problems?





Differential Susceptibility

Some children are, temperamentally, more sensitive to the environment than others.





The divergent paths of the fearless child



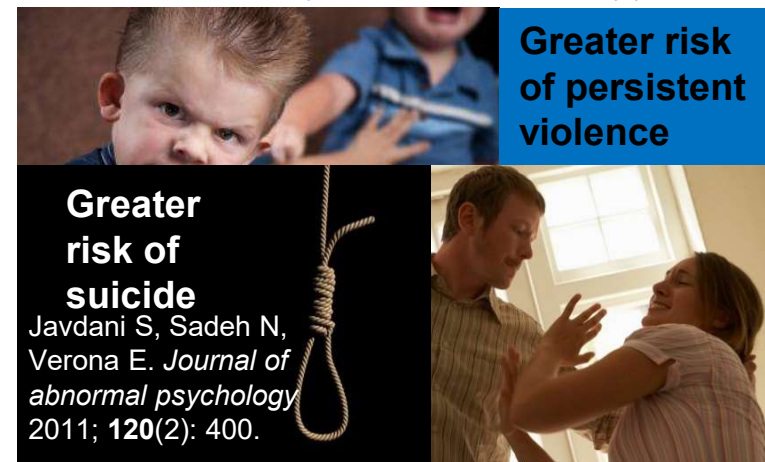
Good enough parenting



Great fun – and more money

Blickle G, Genau HA. *Journal of Research in Personality* 2019; **81**: 25-37.

Waller R, Shaw DS, Hyde LW. *JCPP* 2017; **58**(3): 282-91.;



Greater risk of persistent violence

Greater risk of suicide

Javdani S, Sadeh N, Verona E. *Journal of abnormal psychology* 2011; **120**(2): 400.



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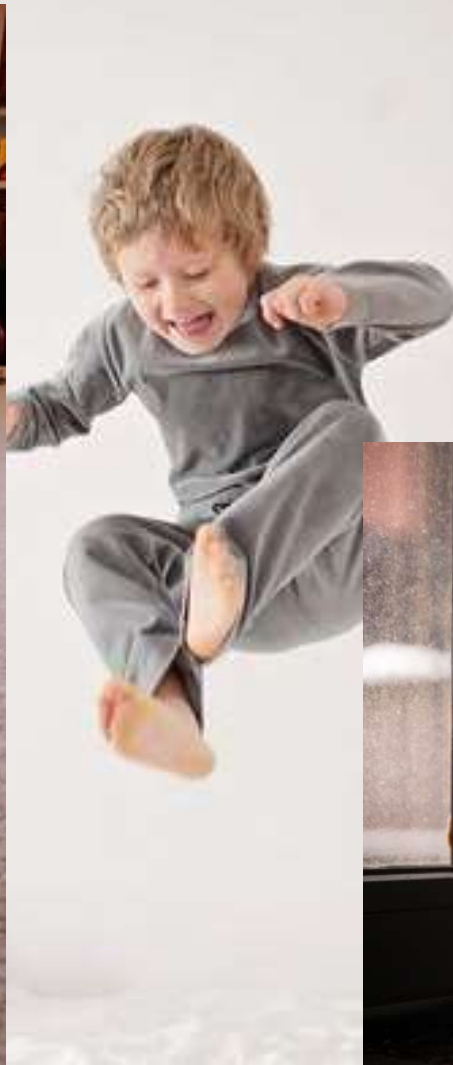
Children with neurodevelopmental problems are likely to have problems with stress calibration

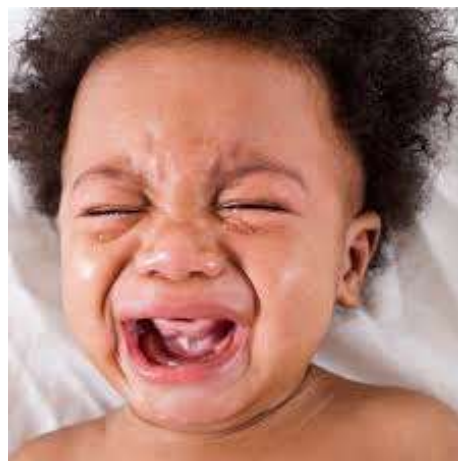




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Children with neurodevelopmental problems can be MUCH harder to look after







What can get in the way of adaptive stress calibration?



Trauma

Both

Neurodevelopmental problems

...and abnormal stress calibration makes forming and maintaining attachment relationships challenging



Attachment Relationships are made up of two parts:



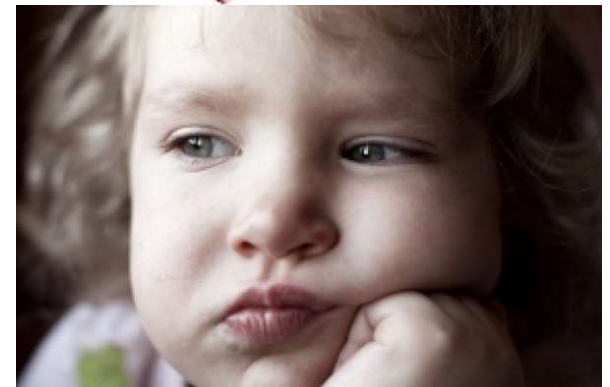


On the attachment behaviours side:





Trauma can impair attachment behaviours





On the caregiving behaviours side :





Neurodevelopmental problems can impair caregiving



e.g. Gul & Gurkan, 2016;
DOI: 10.1177/1087054716658123



Abused and neglected children
with psychiatric diagnoses
seem to have LOTS of
diagnoses



Review Article

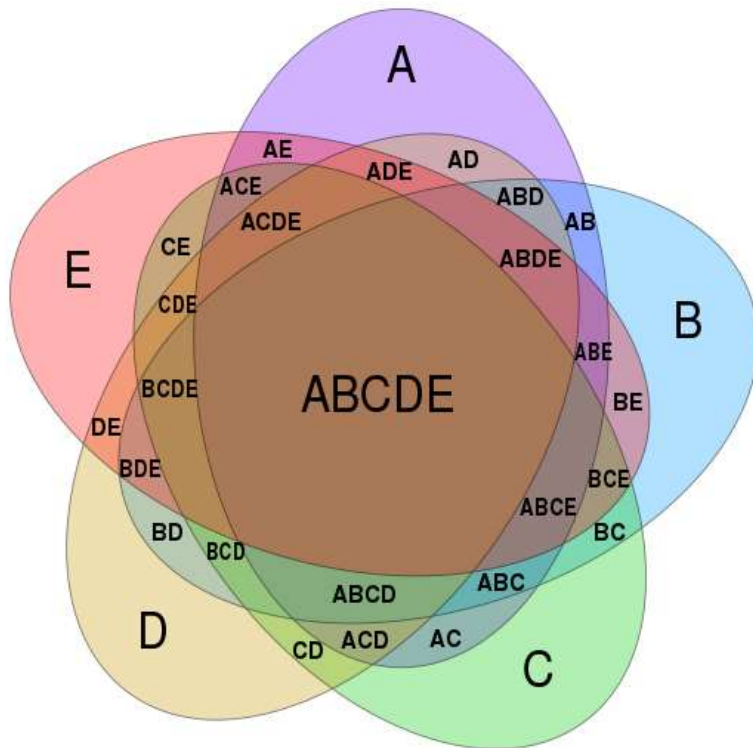
The Scientific World Journal
Volume 2013, Article ID 148468, 5 pages
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2013/148468>

Maltreatment-Associated Psychiatric Problems: Environmentally Triggered ESSENCE?

Helen Minnis



Maltreatment-associated psychiatric problems



In abused and neglected children with psychiatric problems, the complexity seemed much greater. Was this just because I was seeing the children with the biggest problems?



Study 1: Maltreatment-associated neurodevelopmental disorders: a co-twin control analysis

Dinkler, L., Lundström, S., Gajwani, R., Lichtenstein, P., Gillberg, C., & Minnis, H. (2017). Maltreatment-associated neurodevelopmental disorders: a co-twin control analysis. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 58(6), 691-701.



Do children exposed to maltreatment have an increased neurodevelopmental disorder (NDD) load compared to children not exposed to maltreatment?

The Child and Adolescent Twin Study in Sweden (CATSS)

- $N = 13,052$ (49.6% females) aged 9





- ***Do children exposed to maltreatment have an increased neurodevelopmental disorder (NDD) load compared to children not exposed to maltreatment?***



Maltreated



**Not
maltreated**





We asked about symptoms of:

ADHD

Autism

Tic
disorders

Learning
Disability



Yes!

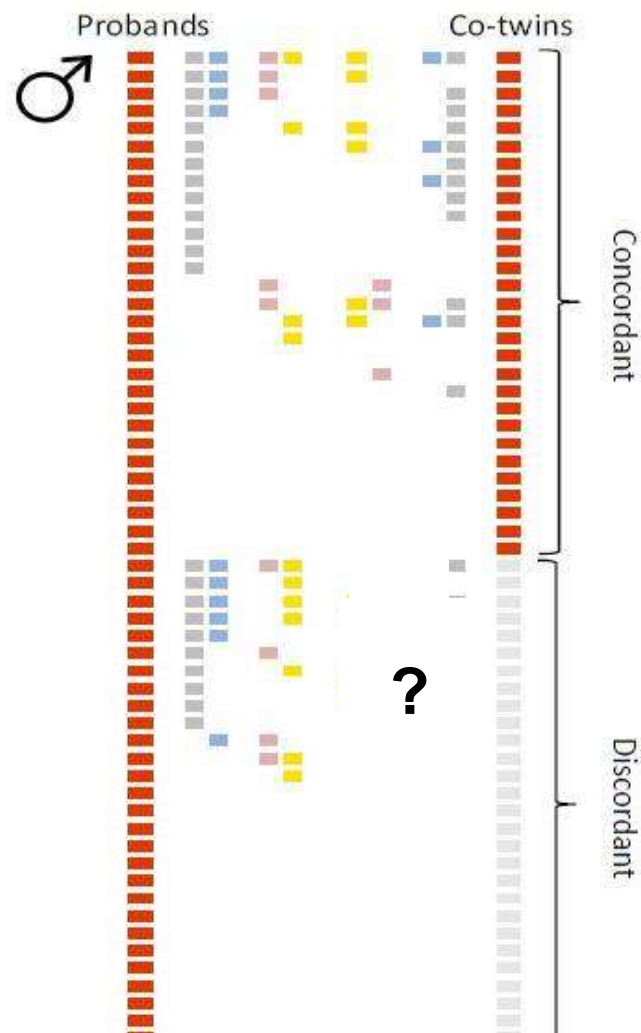
*Maltreated children are nearly **ten times** as likely to have 3 or more neurodevelopmental problems*



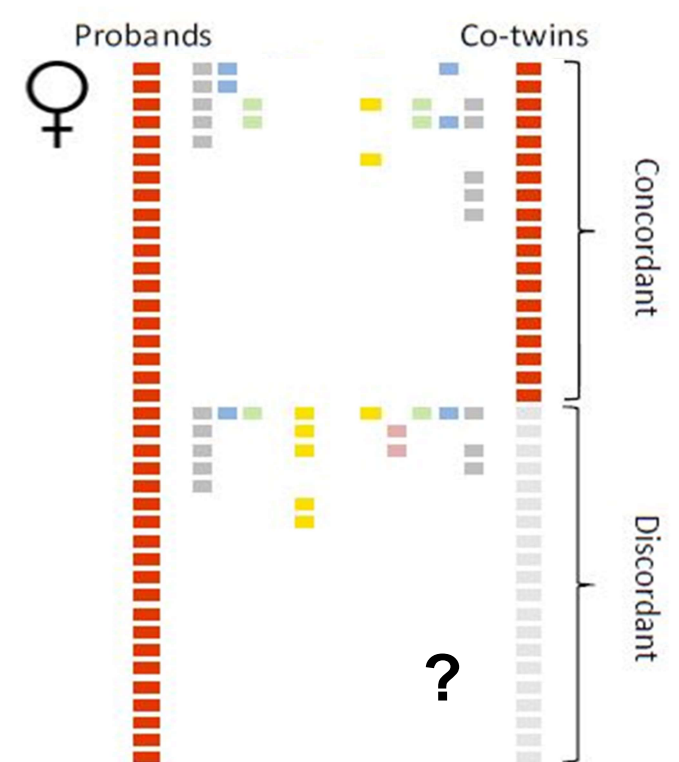
- ***Is child maltreatment a risk factor for an increased neurodevelopmental load?***



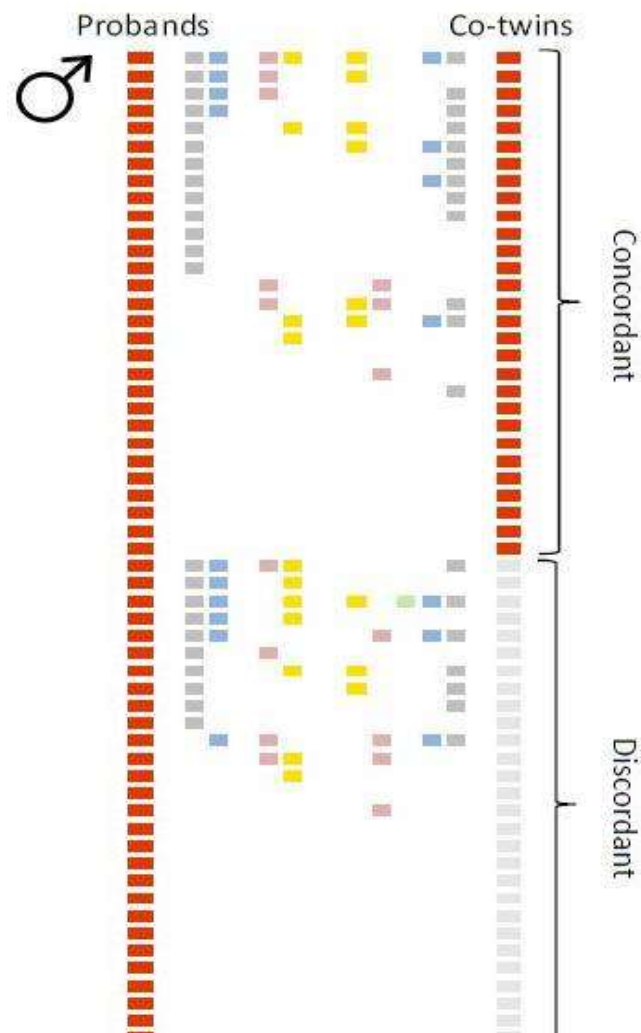
Identical Twins



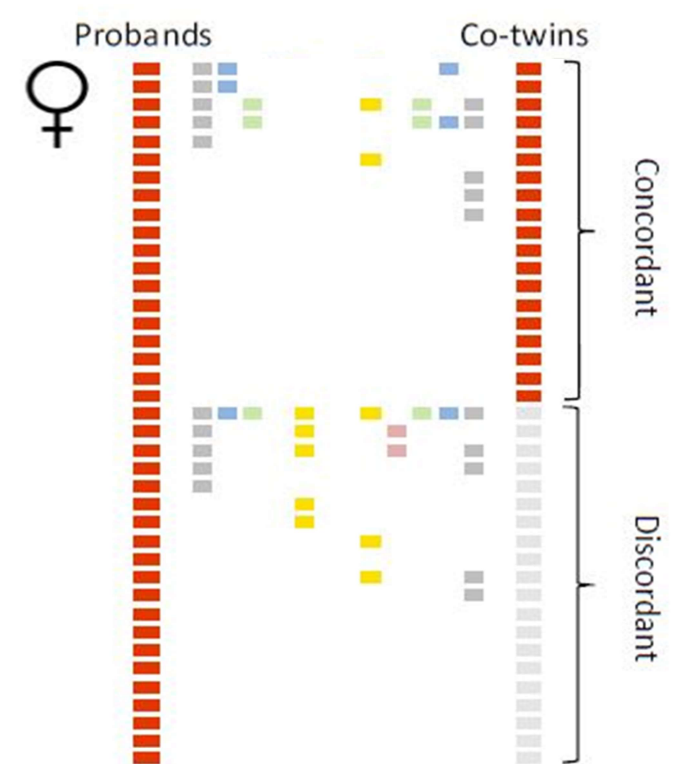
Identical Twins



Identical Twins

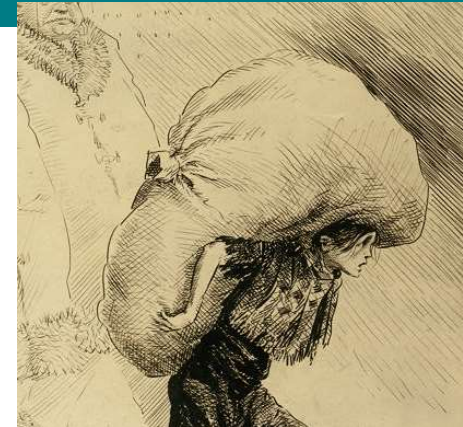
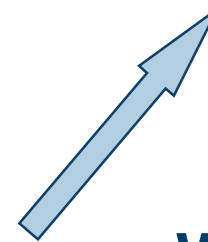
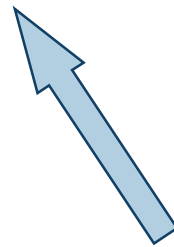


Identical Twins



Legend

- Childhood Maltreatment
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Learning Disorders
- Tic Disorders
- Oppositional-Defiant Disorder



**What are these factors?
Could they be parental
neurodevelopmental
problems?**



Maltreatment disorders

Lisa Dinkler,¹



Helen Minnis

Lisa Dinkler

▶ ▶▶ 0:08 / 6:49

CC ⚙️ 📺 📱 🔍



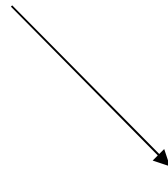
We need to be aware that

1. There is an increased risk of abuse and neglect in children with multiple neurodevelopmental disorders
2. There is an increased risk that abused and neglected children will have (multiple) neurodevelopmental disorders
3. Children and adults who have experienced trauma **need assessment for neurodevelopmental disorders**



Double jeopardy?

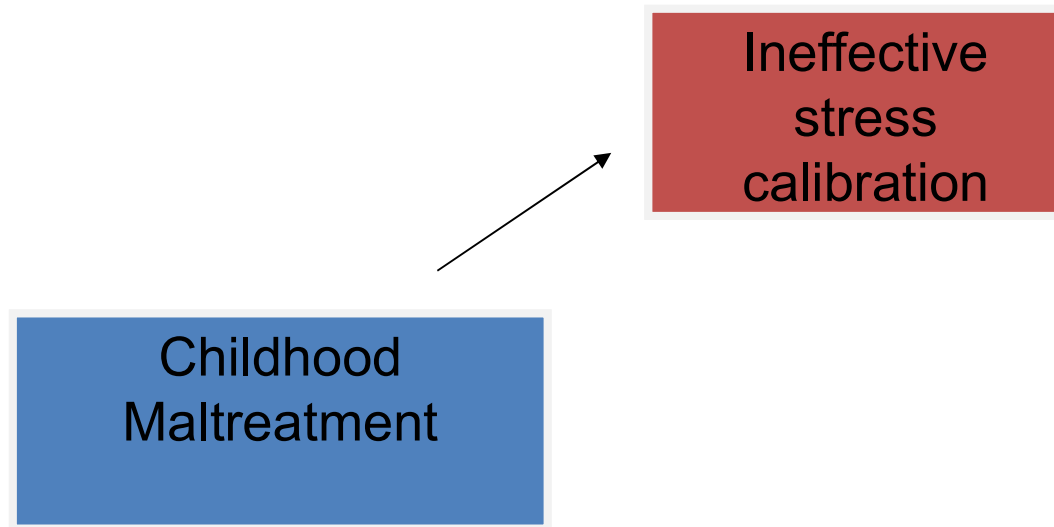
Neurodevelopmental
problems



Ineffective
stress
calibration



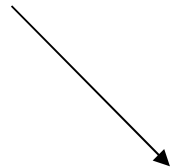
Double jeopardy?



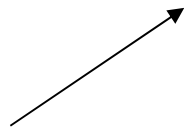


Double jeopardy?

Neurodevelopmental
problems



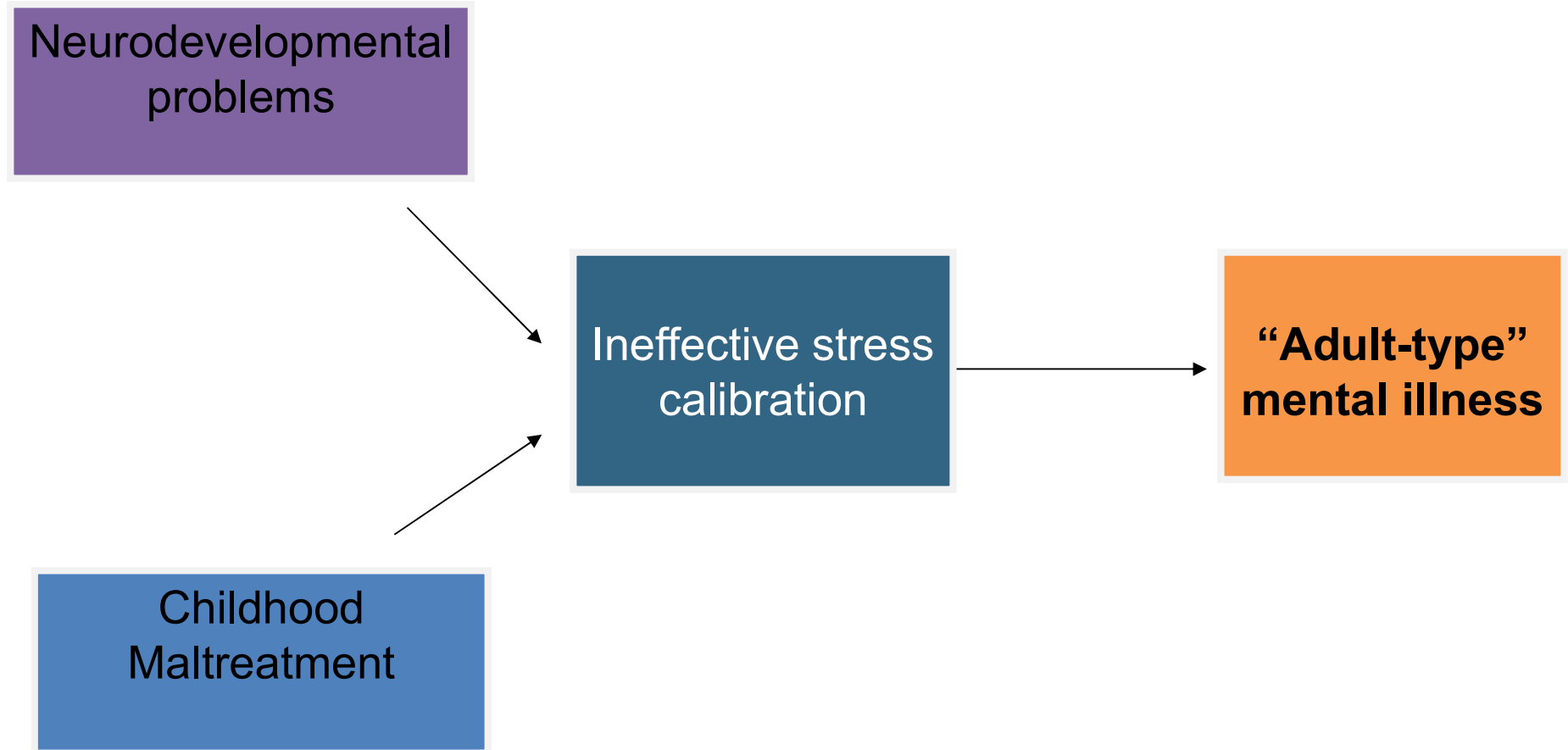
Ineffective stress
calibration



Childhood
Maltreatment



Double jeopardy?





Study 2: Mania symptoms in a Swedish longitudinal population study: the roles of childhood trauma and neurodevelopmental disorders

Gajwani, R., Dinkler, L., Lundström, S., Lichtenstein, P., Gillberg, C., & Minnis, H. *Submitted*



Child and Adolescent Twin Study in Sweden

N = 3348

Age 9

- Abuse and neglect (Life stressor Checklist-R)
- Autism–Tics, AD/HD, and other Comorbidities inventory (A-TAC)

Age 15

Child Mania Rating Scale–Parent Version (CMRS-P)

Age 9

NDDs

Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Autism-Tics, AD/HD, and other Comorbidities inventory (A-TAC)

ADHD

ASD

DCD

Tic Disorder

Learning Disorder



Parents

CTEs

Childhood Traumatic Experiences

Life Stressor Checklist-Revised (LSC-R)

Emotional neglect

Physical abuse

Physical neglect

Substance abuse in family

Sexual abuse

Domestic & other violence

Bullying

Traumatic life events



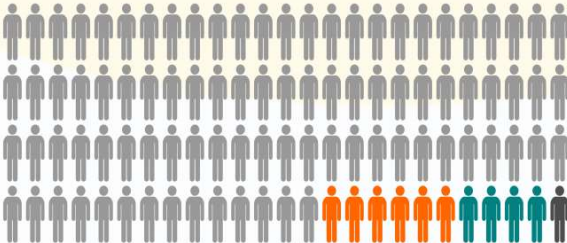
None

CTEs only

NDDs only

Both

in every 100 children



Age 15

JM

Juvenile Mania

Child Mania Rating Scale-Parent Version (CMRS-P)

total range of JM Symptom Score: 0-40, cutoff for JM = 10



Parents

Hearing voices

Irritability

Less need for sleep

Elated mood

Sexually inappropriate behavior

Excess of energy

Racing thoughts

Talking too fast

Grandiosity

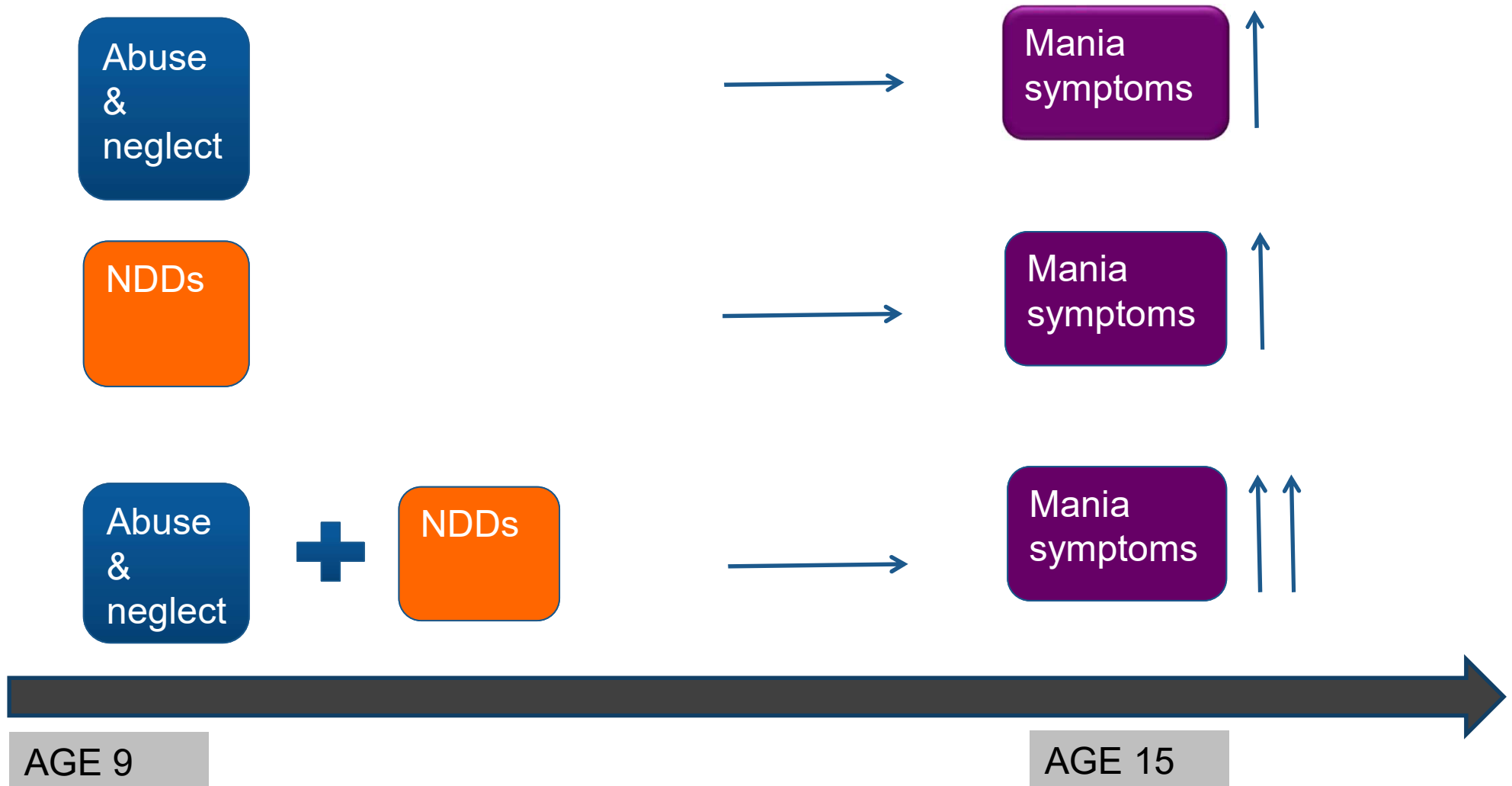
Rage attacks



2%



Hypotheses





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Treatment/Prevention 1: Support stressed parents





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Treatment 2: Work on the attachment relationship



**Relationship-
focussed
interventions**

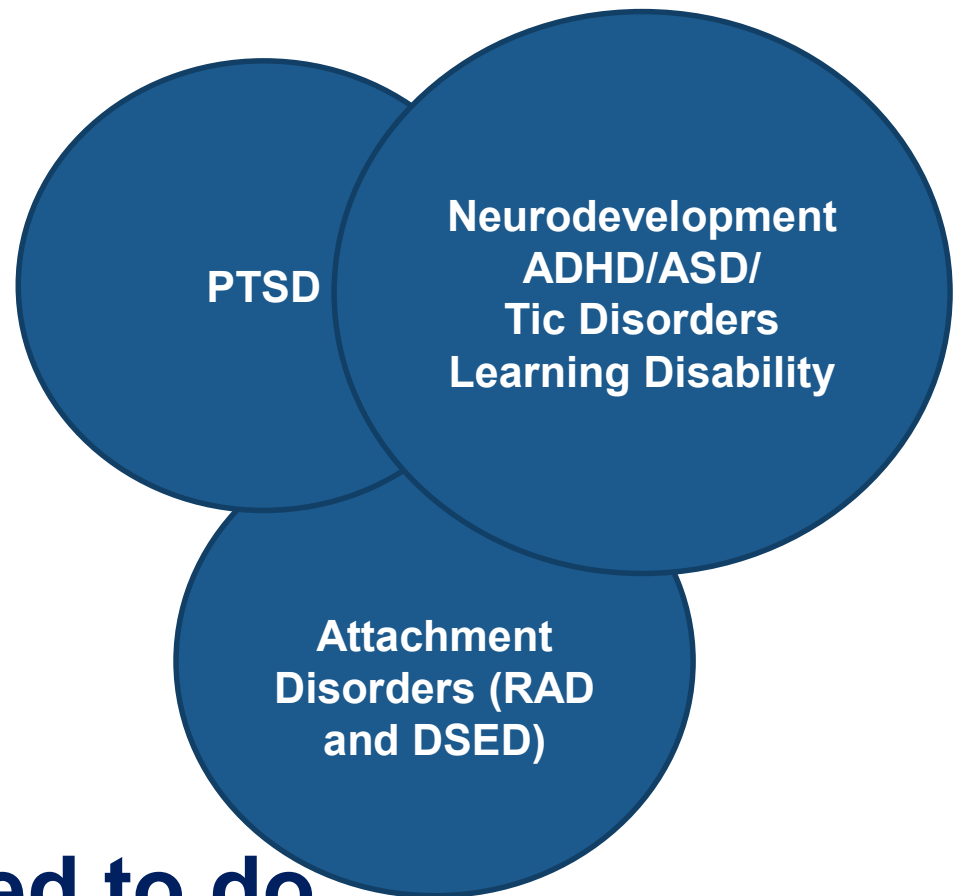
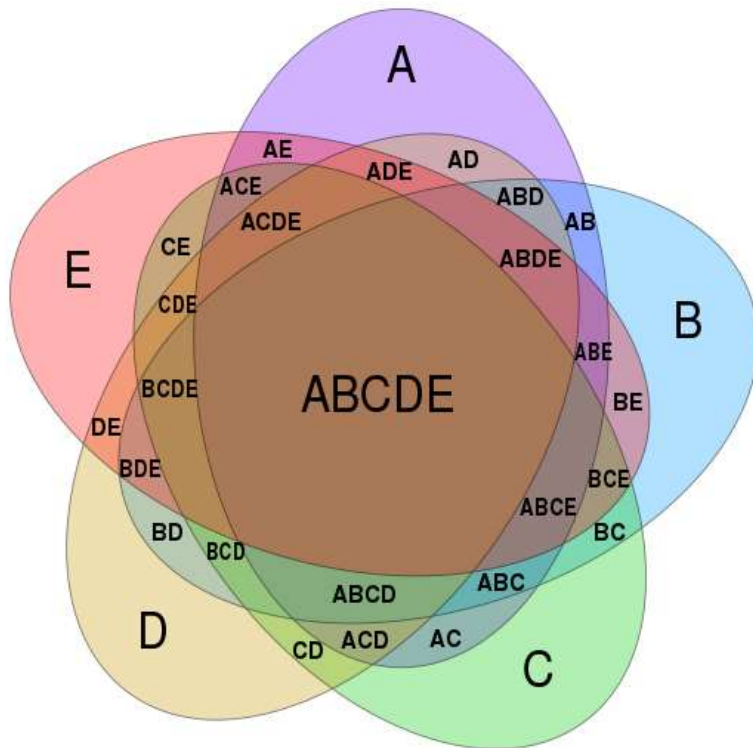


**And other
treatments if
needed (e.g.
stimulants)**



Treatment 3: good formulation

If your child, patient, client has experienced trauma THINK about



That might be all you need to do

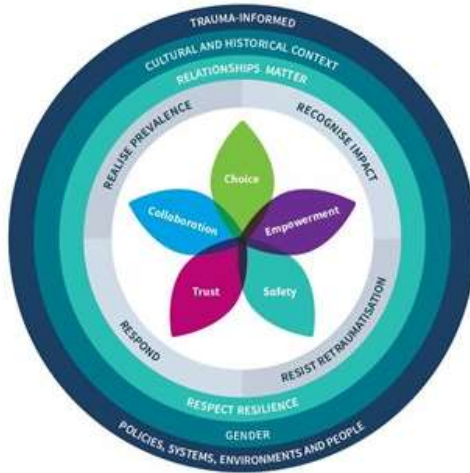


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Treatment 4: Let's stop specialising



TRAUMA-INFORMED ORGANISATIONS



 **AAS**
Adult Autism Service



**TRANSFORMING
PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA:**

A Knowledge and Skills Framework for the Scottish Workforce



 **Women
& Girls** with **ADHD**



Trauma?

BOTH AND

**ADHD?
Autism?**



Quick plug – we are looking for families of primary school age whose children have *either* indiscriminate behaviours *or* autism. Fiona Turner has leaflets with contact details...



Thank you!

**Share Your
Thoughts**