

# Understanding Trauma and Trauma Informed Practice

22<sup>nd</sup> Annual National Prosecutors' Conference

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# 'Psychological Trauma'

Psychological trauma is the **unique individual experience** of an event or enduring conditions, in which:

The individual's ability to integrate his/her emotional experience is overwhelmed, or

The individual experiences (subjectively) a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity.

(Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 60)

# Small T's and Big T's

- Positive Stress
- Tolerable Stress
- Toxic Stress & Allostatic Load



# Brain Architecture



# TRAUMA

## Individual, Group, Community.....

- **Single incident trauma** - unexpected and overwhelming
- **Complex trauma** - inter-personal and enduring
- **Developmental trauma**: exposure to early life trauma ACEs
- **Intergenerational trauma**: living with trauma survivors
- **Historical trauma**: CSA, residential schools etc.
- The experience of **immigrants, refugees, marginalised groups & ethnic minorities**



**Bullying**



**Poverty**



**Peer rejection and  
having no friends**



**Experience of  
racism**



**Death, multiple and  
traumatic loss**



**Community  
violence**



**Food  
scarcity**



**Experience of  
the care system**



**Poor academic  
performance**



**Living in an unsafe  
environment**



1. The Thinking Centre is under-activated



2. The Emotion Regulation Centre is under-activated



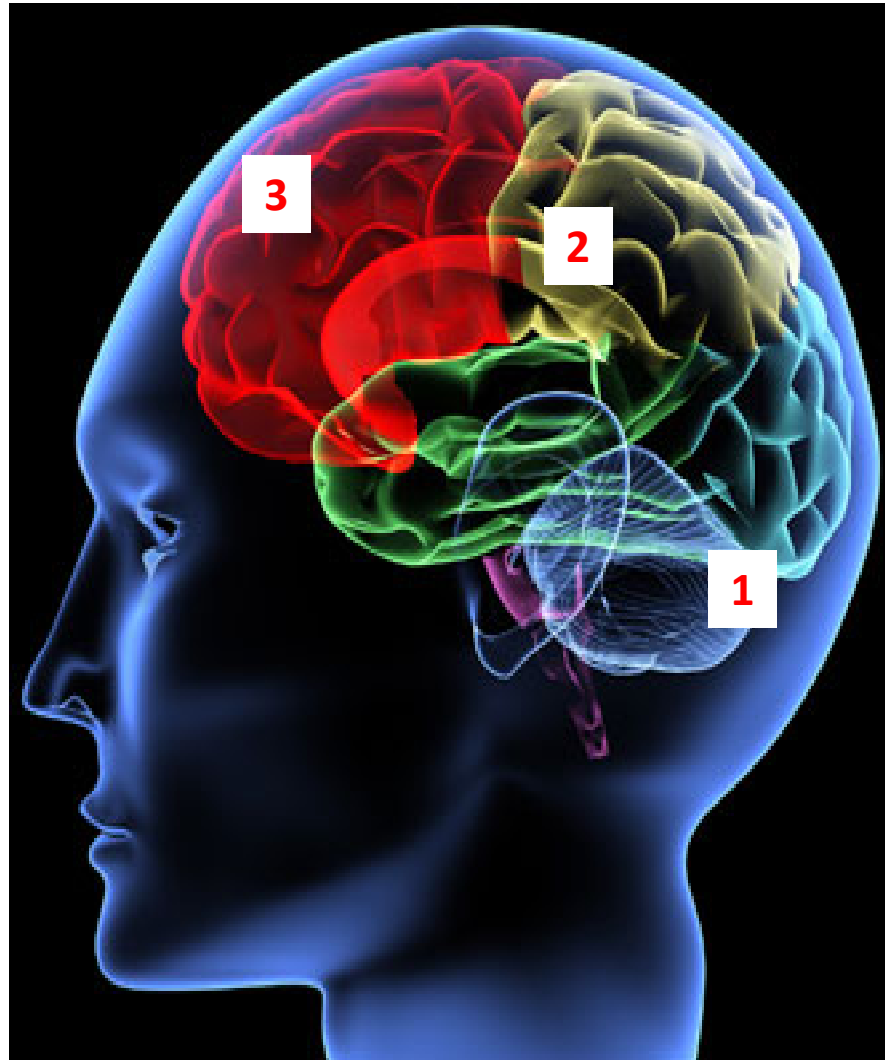
3. The Fear Centre is over-activated.

## Stress & the Brain

# Trauma & the Brain

## 3. Pre frontal cortex/ Thinking Brain

Analyses,  
problem  
solves &  
learns from  
experiences



## 2. Limbic

System/Emotional Brain

Perceives & reacts  
to threat

## 1. Amygdala

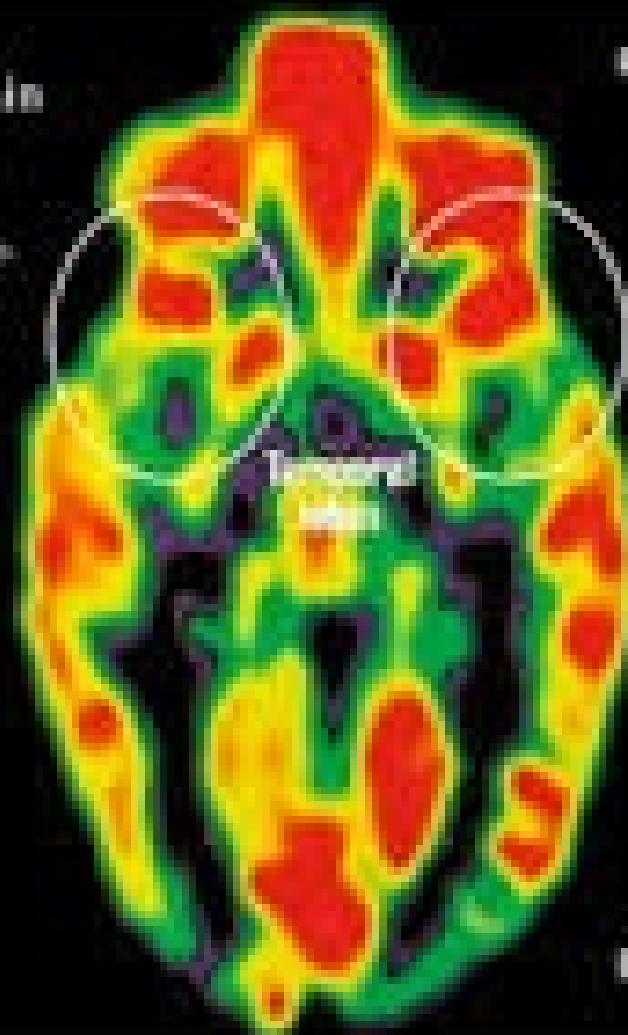
Controls instinctive  
responses

Right amygdala, fear,  
memory, emotion,  
procedural



## Healthy Brain

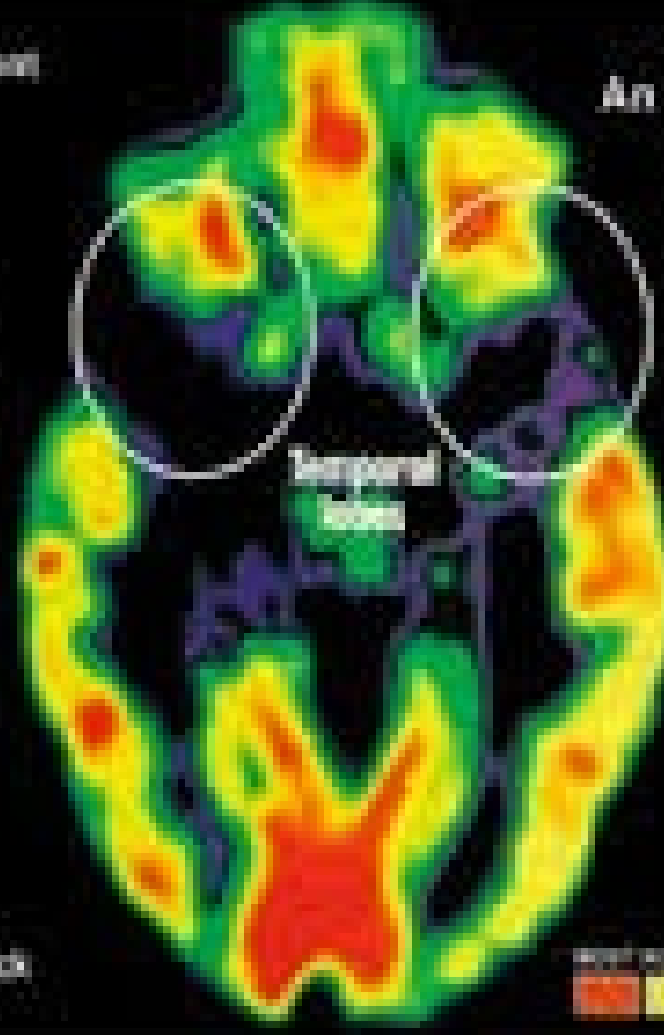
The PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows signs of high (red/orange) blood flow activity in both early attention structures (left and right temporal lobes) and fully functional, as expected, in regions involved in comprehension (left early posterior structures) when the stimuli.



Front

## An Abused Brain

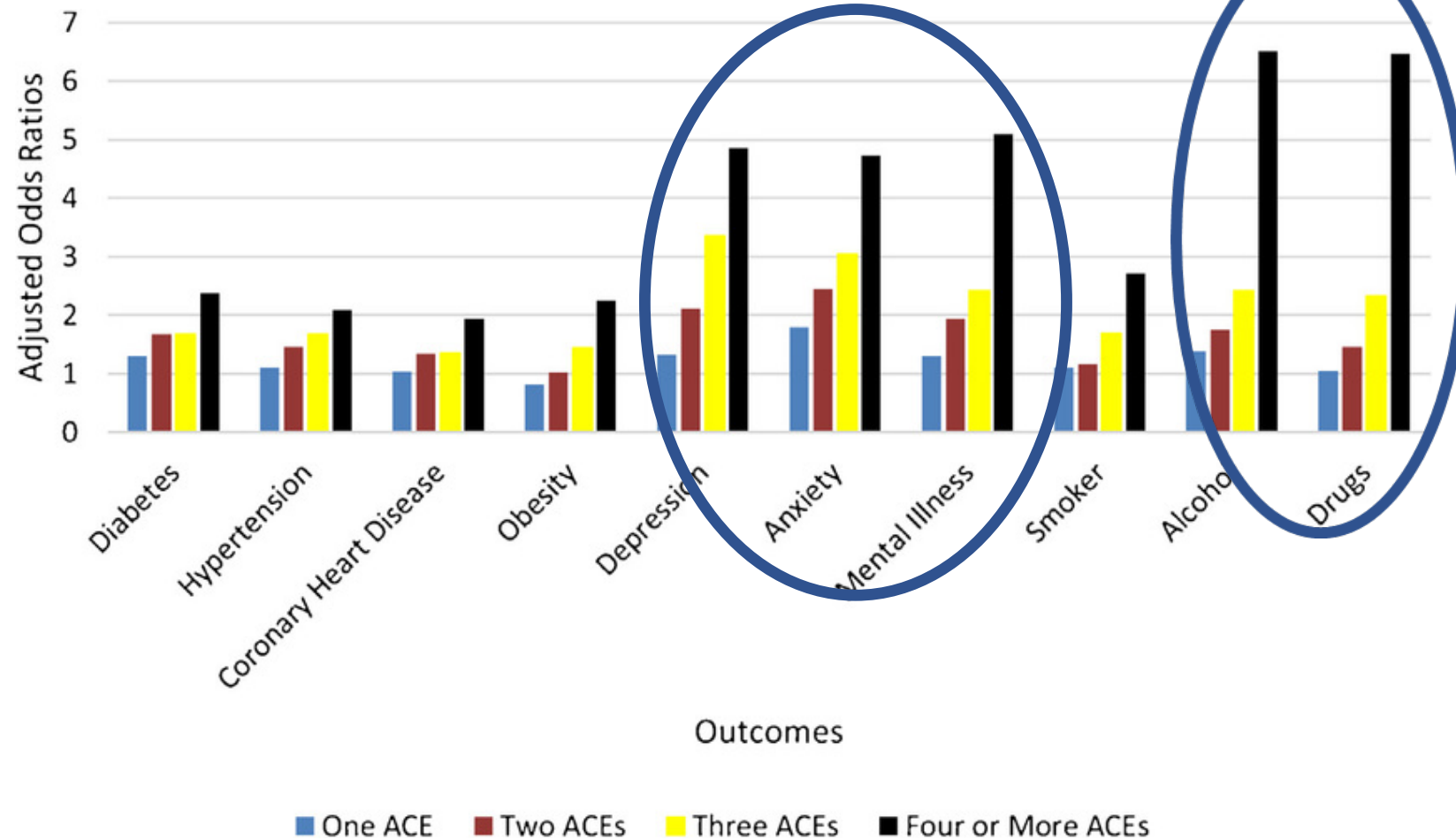
The PET scan of the brain of a 14-year-old child, who has experienced early attention deficit, shows the effect of chronic exposure to injury. The temporal lobes (left and right) which require function and receive input from the brain are mostly atrophied (dark colored) rather than red and orange.



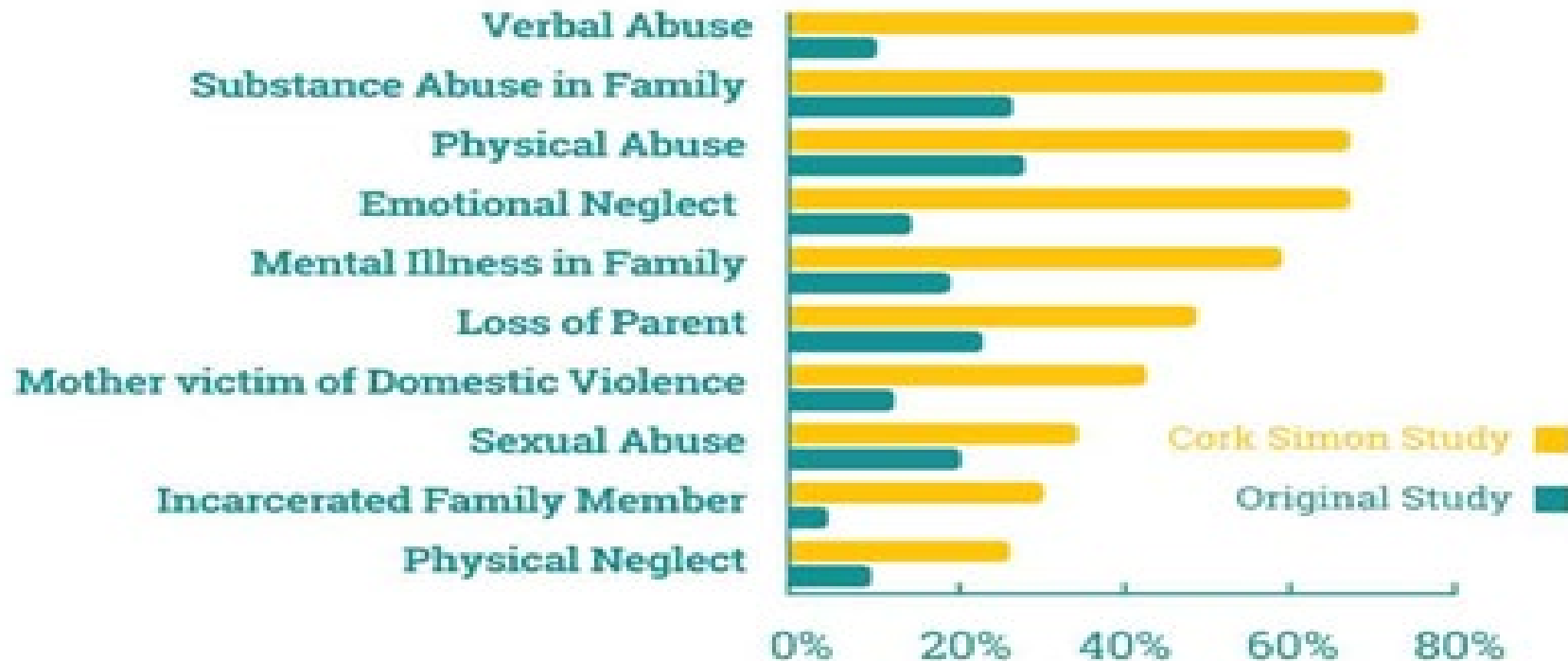
Back

High activity Low activity

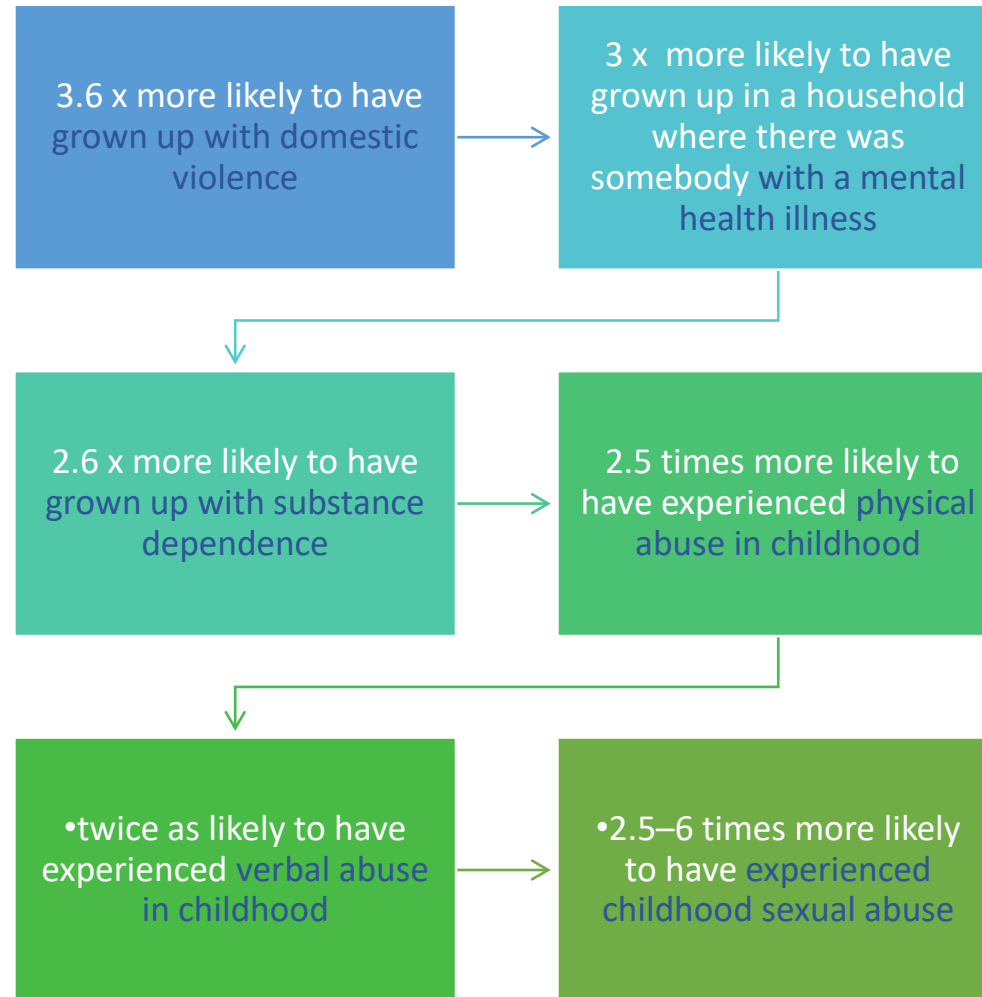
# Dose Response Relationship



## ACEs among Cork Simon service users compared to the general public in the original ACE study:



# Women In Contact With The Probation Service



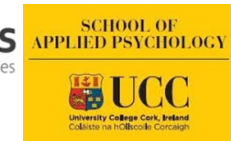
Dermody, A. Gardner, C., Davis, S., Lambert, S., Dermody, J. and Fein, M. (2018)  
'Resilience in the face of trauma: Implications for Service Delivery'. *Irish Probation Journal*, 15 :161-178

# Young People: Justice System

	GYDP	General pop (59)
0 Aces	4%	36.1%
1 ACE	5%	26.0 %
4 or more ACEs	63%	12.5%
Emotional abuse/verbal abuse	68%	10.6%
Physical abuse	38%	28.3%
Sexual abuse	8%	20.7%
Emotional neglect	52%	14.8%
Physical neglect	34%	9.9%
Loss of parent	74%	23.3%
Domestic violence	20%	12.7%
Household substance abuse	66%	26.9%
Household mental illness	54%	19.4%
Incarcerated family member	40%	4.7%

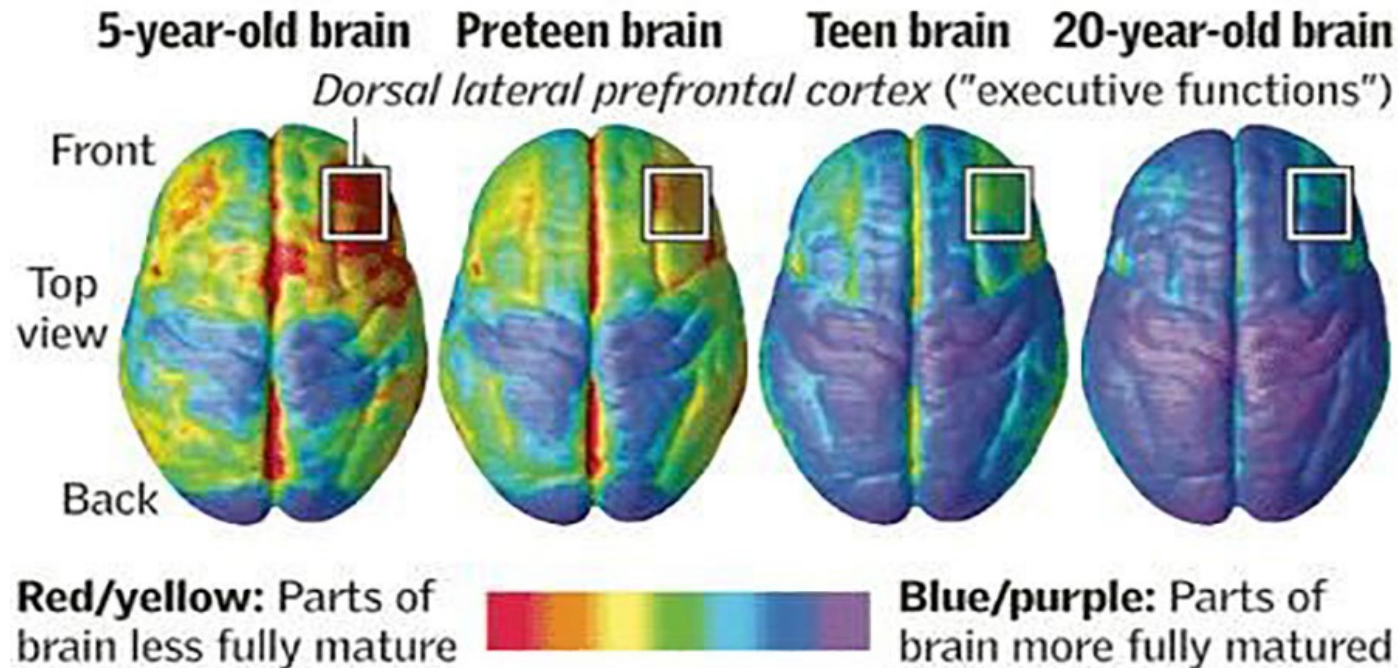


**An Garda Síochána**  
Ireland's National Police and Security Service

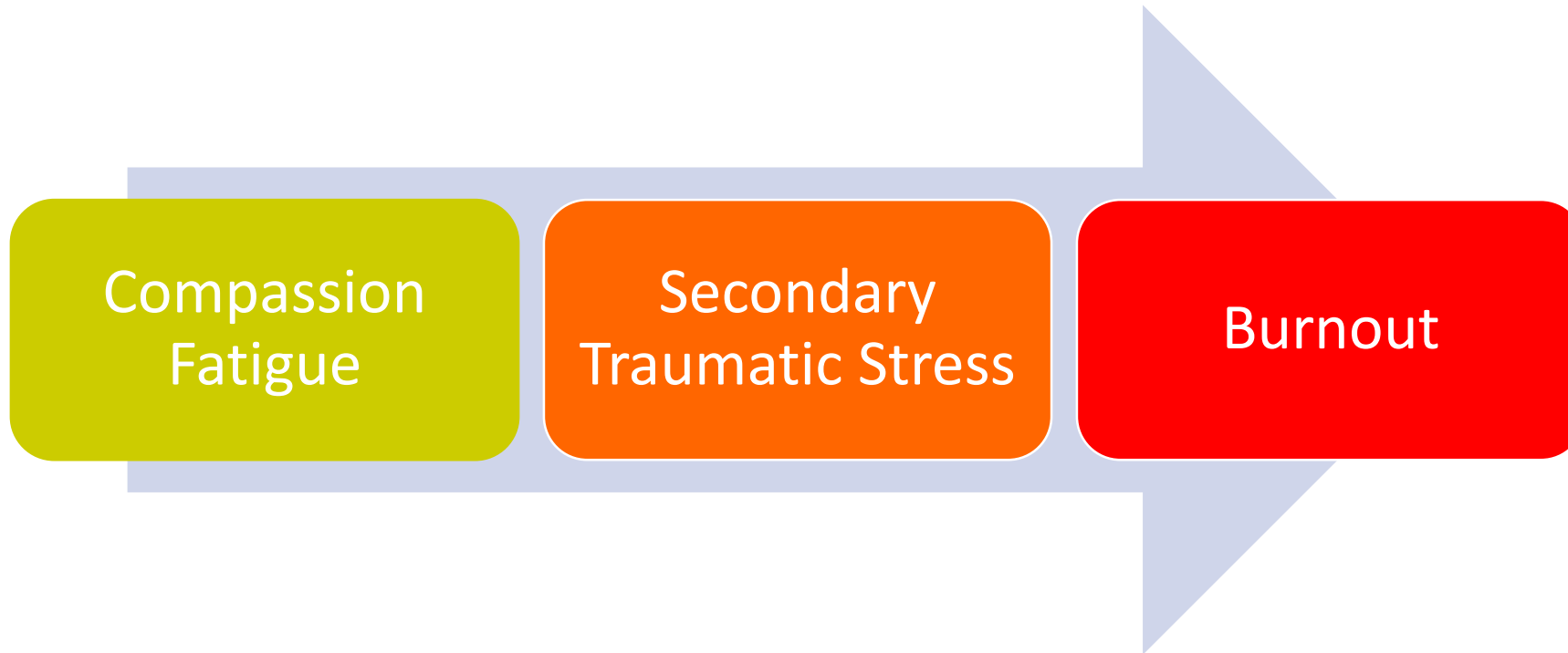


# Young Adults

weighing long-term consequences and controlling impulses — is among the last to fully mature. Brain development from childhood to adulthood:



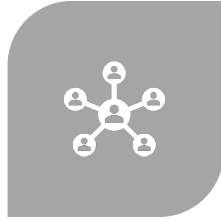
# Trauma Contagion?



# Signs OF STS



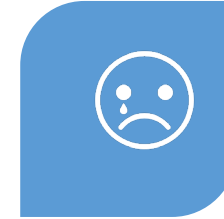
INCREASED FATIGUE OR  
ILLNESS,



SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL,



REDUCED PRODUCTIVITY,



FEELINGS OF HOPELESSNESS,  
DESPAIR, NIGHTMARES,



FEELINGS OF RE-  
EXPERIENCING OF THE  
EVENT, HAVING UNWANTED  
THOUGHTS OR IMAGES OF  
TRAUMATIC EVENTS,



ANXIETY & EXCESS  
VIGILANCE,



AVOIDANCE OF PEOPLE OR  
ACTIVITIES, OR PERSISTENT  
ANGER AND SADNESS



IMPACT ON RELATIONSHIPS  
(ISTSS, 2005)



# Responding

- ✓ Organisational Culture
- ✓ Supervision
- ✓ Reflective Practice
- ✓ Trauma Aware
- ✓ Self Compassion







Thank  
you!!