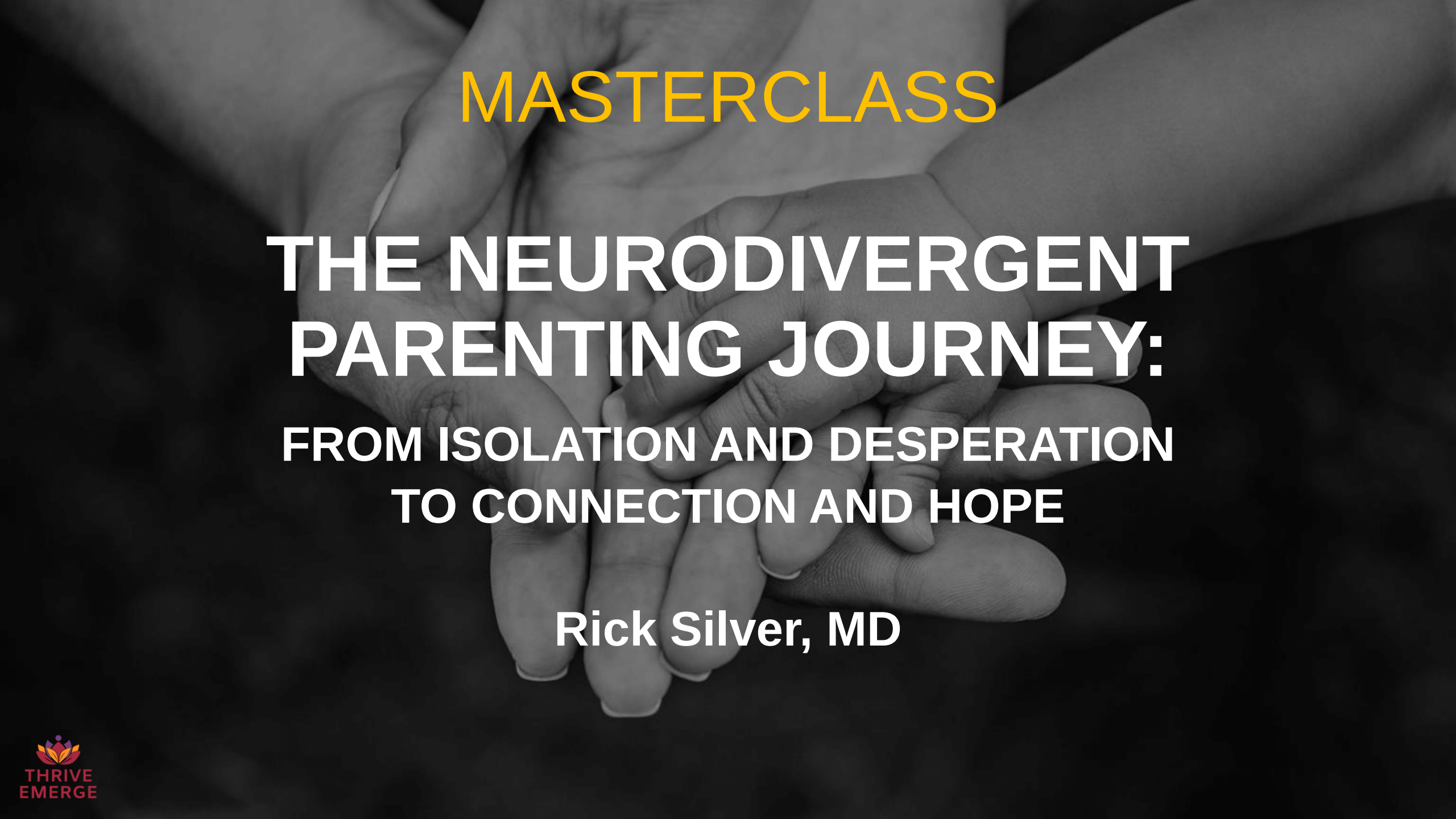




MASTERCLASS

**THE NEURODIVERGENT
PARENTING JOURNEY:
FROM ISOLATION AND DESPERATION
TO CONNECTION AND HOPE**

Rick Silver, MD

PRESENTING TODAY “FROM THE INSIDE”

SURVIVORS AND THRIVERS OF THE NEURODIVERGENT JOURNEY

- Shana Silver – Her ADHD “from the inside” story
- Mary Jo Puglisi, LCPC – Tips and Tools for Parenting

ABOUT ME

- Adult Psychiatrist// Founder, Director of Thrive Emerge
- Neurodivergent teens and young adults struggling with the transition to independent adulthood

ABOUT ME

- 3 daughters/ bookends have ADHD + dyslexia
- My brain: hyperactive/ impulsive ADHD
- Early on personally, professionally: **I knew very little about the neurodivergent brain and neurodivergent experience**
- **Not knowing > longer, harder journey > less able to empower my own children**

MY GOAL TODAY

- To convey what I have learned in my personal and professional journeys about neurodivergent people from the inside
- In order to make your parenting path
 - more manageable
 - more successful
 - more hopeful

QUESTIONS WE NEED TO ANSWER FOR A SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERGENCE FROM THE INSIDE

1. How do I best understand my child's neurodivergent perspective from the inside?
2. How do I shift my way of thinking about my child so it is more neuroaffirming?

QUESTIONS WE NEED TO ANSWER FOR A SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

1. What tools and strategies can I use to make myself more available for my child's growth?
2. How can I create an atmosphere of validation, affirmation, safety and support?

QUESTIONS WE NEED TO ANSWER FOR A SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

MANAGING PARENTING DISTRESS

Every parent of a neurodivergent child has distress about the parenting journey.

1. What makes me most distressed as a parent of a neurodivergent child?
2. Are there times that this distress can get in the way of my child's growth?
3. How do I manage these difficult feelings to be the best possible problem solver with my child?

QUESTIONS WE NEED TO ANSWER FOR A SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

TREATMENT

1. What are the fundamentals of good treatment?
2. What resources are available to help me and my neurodivergent child?

RESOURCES FROM THRIVE EMERGE



Amanda.johnson@mythrive.net



FREE

Slides

Parent Support Group
15-minute consultations



Amanda.johnson@mythrive.net



Neurospicy

A Parent Empowerment Guide

Excerpts from the
upcoming book



Life Hacks for Families with
Neurodivergent Young Adults
Reaching for Launch

Rick Silver, MD
with contributions from the
Thrive Emerge Clinical Staff



AVAILABLE ON AMAZON!



Amanda.Johnson@mythrive.net

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERGENCE FROM THE INSIDE

Jack's Story

Cognitive Rigidity

+

Concrete Thinking

+

Struggles to Understand Social Nuances

+

Emotional Dysregulation/ Overwhelm

+

Limited Coping Strategies

=

Threatening, emotionally intolerable experience of daily life

TO UNDERSTAND YOUR NEURODIVERGENT KID,
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THEIR BRAIN!



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY NEURODIVERGENT?

ADHD/ Executive Dysfunction

+

Autism Spectrum Disorder (High Functioning/ High Masking)

=

AuDHD

THE NEURODIVERGENT UMBRELLA

- Learning Disabilities
- Slow Processing Speed
- Receptive and Expressive Language Deficits
- Nonverbal Learning Disability (Developmental Visual Spatial Disorder)
- Comorbidities/ Co-occurring Conditions – mood, anxiety, substance overuse, electronics overuse, small “t” trauma



THE NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN
STRUGGLES TO SELF-REGULATE



CONSTANT FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT RESPONSE



A SENSE OF
DATA OVERLOAD
AND **DYSREGULATION**



AN INTUITIVE SENSE OF INTERNAL DYSREGULATION

- The inner world feels unpredictable, with no sense of a “physiologic home.”
- “A pendulum without the dignity of center.”
- “My body and brain don’t match”
- “Not comfortable in my own skin.”
- “I’m just white knuckling it all the time.”

AN INTUITIVE SENSE OF INTERNAL DYSREGULATION



EMOTIONAL



EXECUTIVE
FUNCTION



SENSORY



IMPULSE



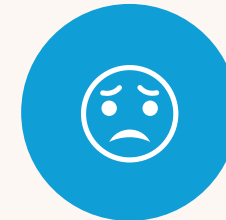
VOLUME OF THOUGHTS/
“FREIGHT TRAIN BRAIN”



SOCIAL
RECIPROCITY



COGNITIVE
FLEXIBILITY



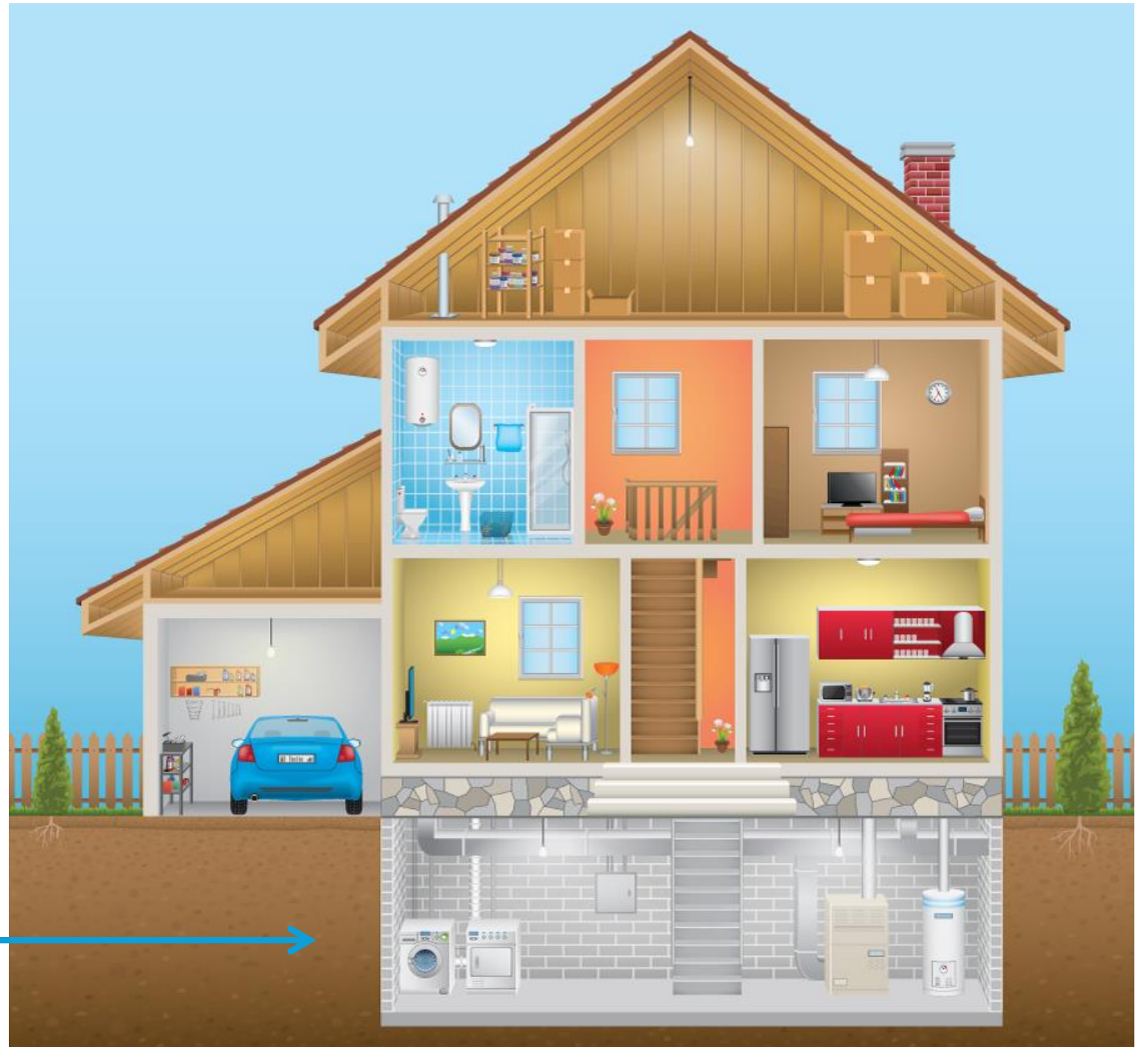
MOOD/ ANXIETY

The challenge of data overload and dysregulation



THE HOUSE OF LIFE SKILLS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

EMOTIONAL REGULATION





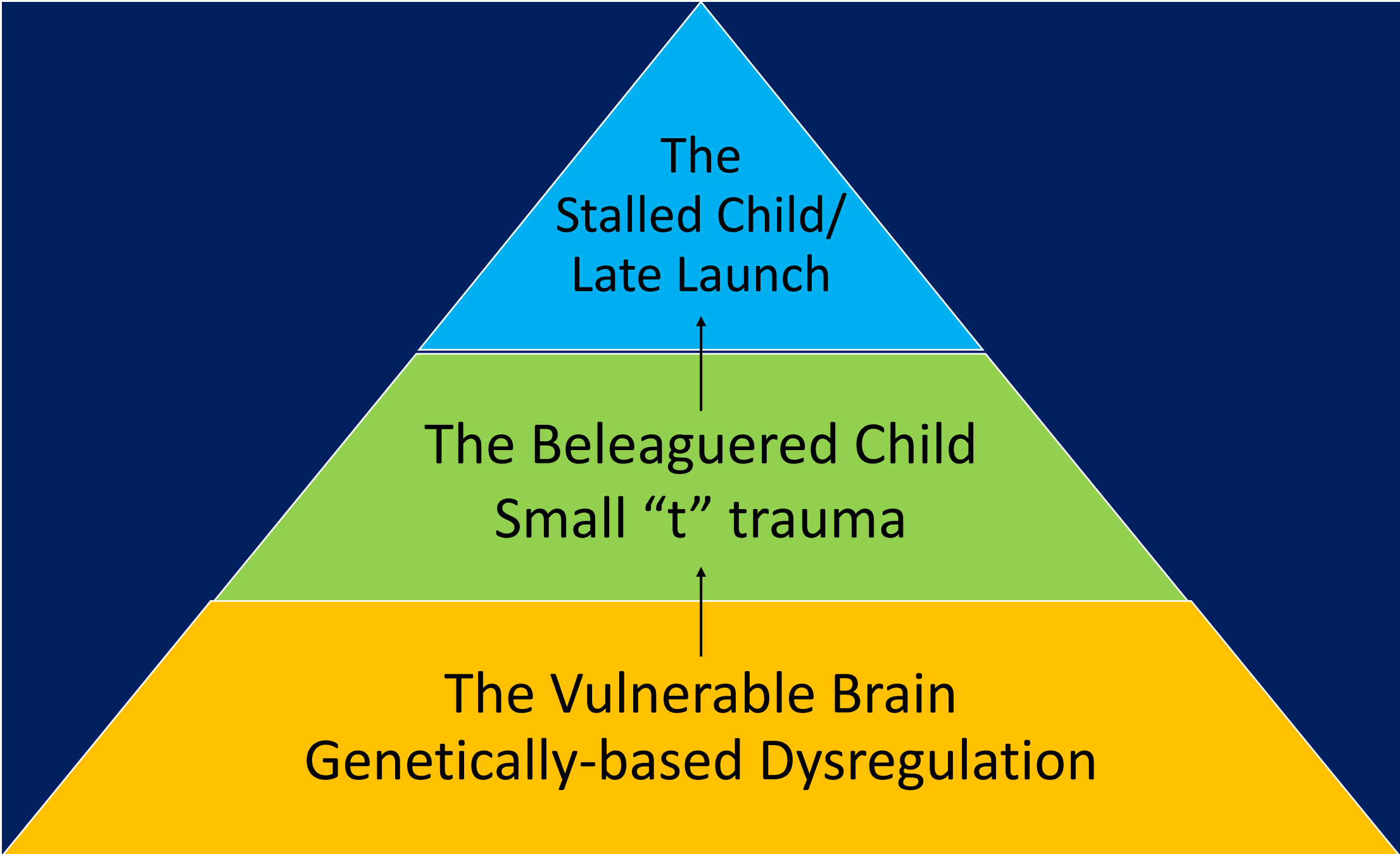
VULNERABLE
BRAIN



BELEAGUERED
CHILD



STALLED YOUNG ADULT/
LATE LAUNCH



The
Stalled Child/
Late Launch

The Beleaguered Child
Small “t” trauma

The Vulnerable Brain
Genetically-based Dysregulation

SCOTT'S STORY

24 yrs old

Not working

Tried college,
community college
> dropped out

Living in the
basement

Smoking weed
(a lot)

6+ hours of
electronics daily

Social contacts:
electronic only

No movement
towards
independence

Craig's Story

Making a Life-Thrive



SHANA'S STORY

PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

PREDICTABILITY

1. Consistent Response
2. Contracts



PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

RELATIONSHIP FIRST

- a. You are their only parent > you must be emotionally there for them
- b. You can't be their frontal lobe/
Can't battle them
- c. Use resources

PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

1. Setting realistic expectations for the developmental path/ duration
2. The middle path: don't set the bar too high or too low – balance push with patience
3. Know your child's capabilities and challenges
4. Set one key goal/ small changes
5. Give them little wins > POSITIVE FEEDBACK

PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

MANAGING EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

To help with initiation:

- Break large tasks down to smaller chunks.
- Set manageable, real deadlines for each step.
- Stick to designated productivity times to be task focused > tackle the To Do list.
- Label (color code) your list: Set in Stone, High Priority, Nice To Do
- Use timers, alarms, and reminders to get started or to break.
- Stick to the timelines you set.
- Reward yourself for task completion.

PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

MANAGING EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

Improving the situation without the usual shouting match:

- Engage your teen/young adult in an open conversation to make decisions about what they will do, when, and how you can best support them.
- Consider creative options.
- Create a system for checking in that isn't constant.
- Rule of thumb: nine episodes of praise offset every one of criticism.

PARENTING TOOLS FOR A GROWTH MINDSET

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

PREDICTABILITY

- How am I not predictable?
- What leads to my unpredictability?
- How can I as a parent practice strategies that make me more predictable to my child?

RELATIONSHIP

- What do I do that creates conflict for us? How can I let go of that?

EXPECTATIONS

- Do I back down from setting expectations with my child? Why?
- Am I expecting too much? Not expecting enough?

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

- What are two things I can help my kid do to get started on tasks like homework?
- How might I turn shouting matches into productive task time with my kid?

MANAGING DISTRESS

PARENTING DISTRESS

- Inherent part of the neurodivergent journey
- We can't:
 - Make them all better
 - Protect them from suffering
 - Know what the future will bring
- “No roadmap” > uncertainty > fear, anger, sadness
- Managed well > productive, supportive relationship
- Unexamined > overrides our ability to generate healthy solutions
- What develops: unhealthy family dynamics > prevent growth

FLAVORS OF PARENTING DISTRESS

- The Angry Parent
- The Exhausted Parent
- The Grieving/ Not accepting Parent
- The Unaware Parent – Nothing wrong with me/ Nike parenting
- “Not On The Same Sheet Of Music” Parents
- The Fearful/ Paralyzed/ Conflict Avoidant Parent

THE ANGRY PARENT

- P afraid that child will not live up to cultural expectations of eldest son
- Unrealistically high expectations of school performance
- Constant vigilance, criticism and anger
- P afraid that child might have academic setback and get suicidal
- Kid has no agency, lies to avoid disappointing parent, has no experience of natural consequences

THE EXHAUSTED PARENT

- Other neurodivergent kids at home
- Other parent essentially absent
- Multiple attempts to change behavior never successful
- Busy with job, other kids
- Stopped delivering consequences – “I give up”
- Kid locked into avoidant/ numbing patterns – no school or job, excessive drug or electronics use

THE GRIEVING/ NOT ACCEPTING PARENT

- “They will never be what I want them to be – no Hallmark card ending”
- Sadness in the face of the kid’s significant achievements/ progress
- Struggle to let go of the role of the “needed parent” – the child will always be “broken”

THE UNAWARE PARENT

- Nike Parenting – “Just Do It”
- Nothing wrong with me/ Fix my kid
- The fault lies with the kid: lack of willpower
- Communication with kid is usually problematic
- No real effort to generate realistic solutions and expectations

“NOT ON THE SAME SHEET OF MUSIC” PARENTS

- Fighting between parents
- “Sabotaging” each other’s efforts
- Unclear/ inconsistent expectation setting for kid
- Variable consequences depending on the parent

THE FEARFUL/ PARALYZED/ CONFLICT AVOIDANT PARENT

- Parent does not like emotional intensity or conflict
- Kid has threatened/ attempted suicide
- Kid has threatened parents
- Parent may set expectations but can't deliver consequences
- Child uses risk of harm to self or others to manipulate the home
- Child locked into an unstructured/ unproductive daily pattern

DEALING WITH DISTRESS

1. Become aware of the role that your behavior plays
2. Manage your intense emotions through DBT, CBT, Polyvagal
3. Improve communications -- not avoiding or escalating
4. Practice setting and delivering expectations and consequences
5. This is hard to do alone > use outside support
6. Provide your kid with treatment that moves them out of their old patterns into healthy skill and psychological development

QUICKIE RESCUE

- Stop the interaction/ take a break/ walk away
- Bring down your emotional tone/ Ventral Vagal/ breathe/ relax
- Have a conversation with yourself. Ask:
 - What is making me emotionally charged in this moment?
 - Why so much fear/ anger/ sadness?
 - How can I release/ deal with those feelings?
 - What is the worst thing that could happen in THIS moment?
How likely is that? Can I live with that outcome?
 - What are some other approaches I can use to understand my kid and create mutual solutions that they have buy-in to?

MEDIUM RANGE DISTRESS TOLERANCE: MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

- Set up a calm time to talk
- Aim for their buy-in to the solution
- Ask your child:
 - What is YOUR experience?
 - What are your goals?
 - What choices are you making?
 - What are the pros and cons of your choices in reaching your goals?
 - Can we problem solve some other solutions?

LONGER-TERM DISTRESS TOLERANCE

- Get help and support – family, friends, professional
- Practice emotional self-awareness: what am I feeling and why?
- Ventral Vagal Response -- prayer, meditation/ relaxation
- Cognitive tools -- DBT/ CBT
- Get informed -- learn about ND > develop neuroaffirming approaches
- Therapy – Individual (trauma, addictions)/ Couple's/ Family
- Self-care – sleep, exercise, nutrition
- Medication

PARENT DISTRESS ASSESSMENT

DISTRESS TOLERANCE/ ENABLING

- ☐ The parents can separate their own distress from that of their child's
- ☐ The parents often try to protect or rescue the child from difficult feelings
- ☐ Poorly managed parental distress often results in excess vigilance or criticism of the child
- ☐ The family backs away from confrontation and buries important emotional issues “under the carpet”
- ☐ Challenges in managing distress for both the parents and the child result in emotionally escalating conversations
- ☐ Parents and child have poor distress tolerance skills

PARENT DISTRESS ASSESSMENT

SETTING LIMITS/ DELIVERING CONSEQUENCES

- ☐ Parents struggle to set clear, achievable behavioral expectations for the child
- ☐ Rewards and consequences are not clearly defined for the child
- ☐ Parents inconsistently deliver both rewards and consequences
- ☐ The child “holds the power” in the family: parents are manipulated by the child > escalates into suicidality, threats of harm to others > consequences avoided

PARENT DISTRESS ASSESSMENT

COMMUNICATIONS

- ☐ The family unable to explore and problem solve complex emotional issues
- ☐ The parents not supportive of the child/ not patient with their struggles.
- ☐ Communication among family members is limited
- ☐ The parents do not know their child emotionally

TREATMENT

TREATMENT

- We do not fix neurodivergence – b/o they are not broken
- Build life skills and a strong psychological foundation (good self-regulation)
- Help them emerge from isolation and protection into self-acceptance and a sense of meaning and purpose
- Improve their ability to function more independently in the neurotypical world

TREATMENT

THE FOUR R'S OF TREATMENT

- Relate
- Regulate
- Recover
- Rx

TREATMENT

RELATE

- We heal in community and connection
- Peer-based care is the most powerful catalyst for change
- Validation/ Believing in the person

TREATMENT

REGULATE

- Complex/ Wraparound services
- Interoception/ emotional self-awareness and expression
- DBT, CBT, body-centered therapies
- Self-care – regular sleep schedule, exercise
- Structured, productive days – daily AM check-in to plan the day
- EF coaching/ body doubling

TREATMENT

RECOVER

- **Video detox**
- Talk therapy – individual, couples, family work
- Career coaching/ Highland's/ job development
- Deeper id issues – empty, chronic SI, no sense of meaning

TREATMENT

RX

- EF/ ADHD
- Comorbidities/ Co-occurring disorders
 - Mood
 - Anxieties – social, GAD, OCD
 - Trauma
 - Substance use



THANK YOU



QUESTION AND ANSWER