

**RECOGNIZING  
AND  
UNDERSTANDING  
MENTAL HEALTH  
SYMPTOMS IN  
CHILDREN**

**NIHIT KUMAR, MD  
TIFFANY BRANDT, PH.D**

**UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS  
FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES**

# OVERVIEW

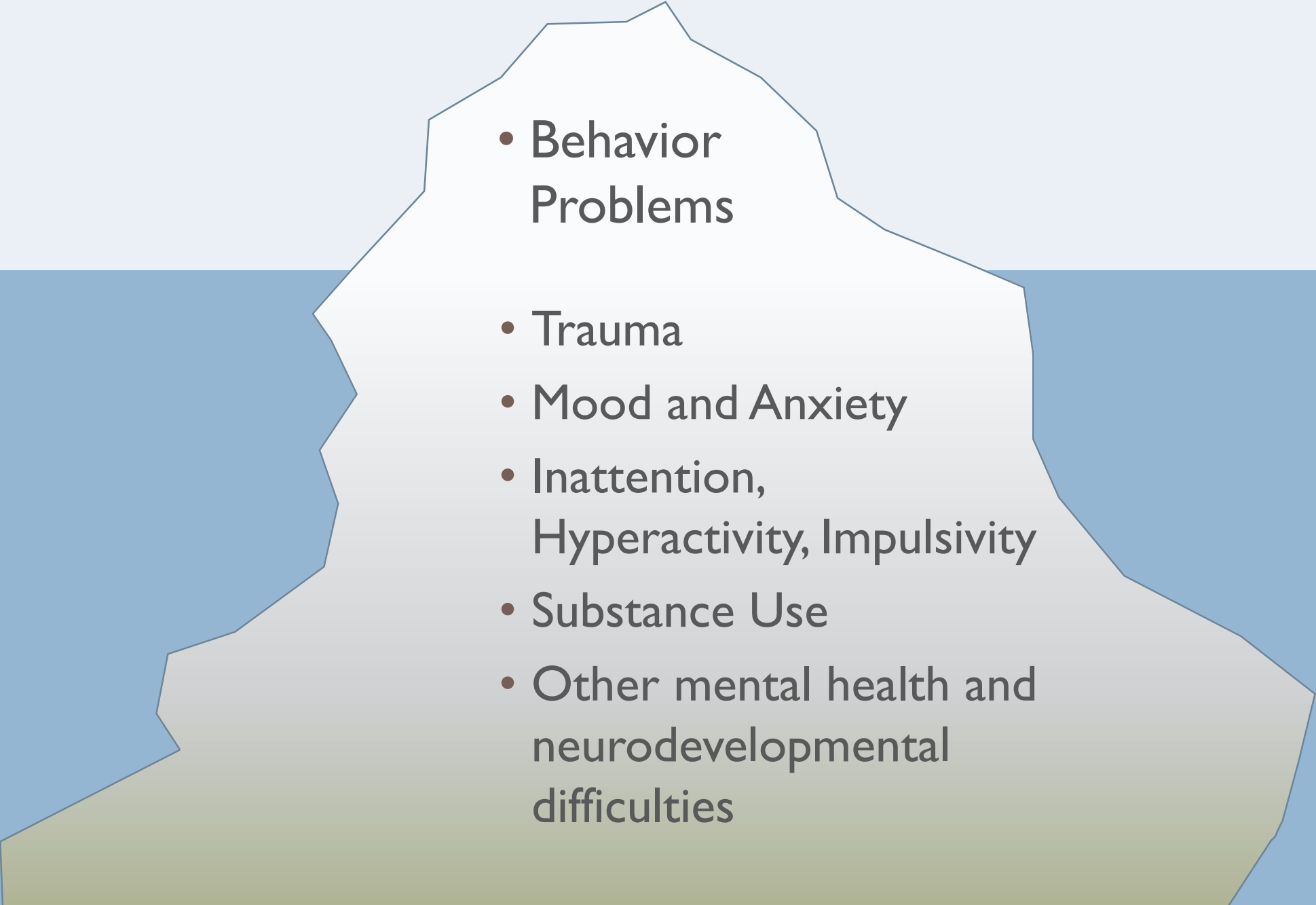
- Behavior Problems of Children in the System
- Child Mental Health Symptoms
  - Trauma
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - ADHD
- Treatment Options
  - Psychotherapy
  - Psychopharmacology



# **CHILD BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS**

# CHILDHOOD BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

- Anger
- Hostile and cold
- Untrusting
- Perceiving danger everywhere
- Problems with change and transition
- Guarded
- Difficulty with redirection
- Physical and emotional reactivity
- Tantrums/Outbursts
- Holding on to grudges
- Regressive behavior
- Rejecting support
- Not following rules
- Unwilling to do what they are told

- 
- Behavior Problems
  - Trauma
  - Mood and Anxiety
  - Inattention, Hyperactivity, Impulsivity
  - Substance Use
  - Other mental health and neurodevelopmental difficulties



# **CHILD MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS**

# TRAUMA

- Physical and emotional responses of a child to events that threaten the life or physical integrity of the child or of someone critically important to the child.
- Trauma overwhelms a child's capacity to cope and elicits feelings of terror, powerlessness and out-of-control physiological arousal
- 34% of children experience at least one type of trauma
- By age 3 ½ children experience 4-5 traumatic events

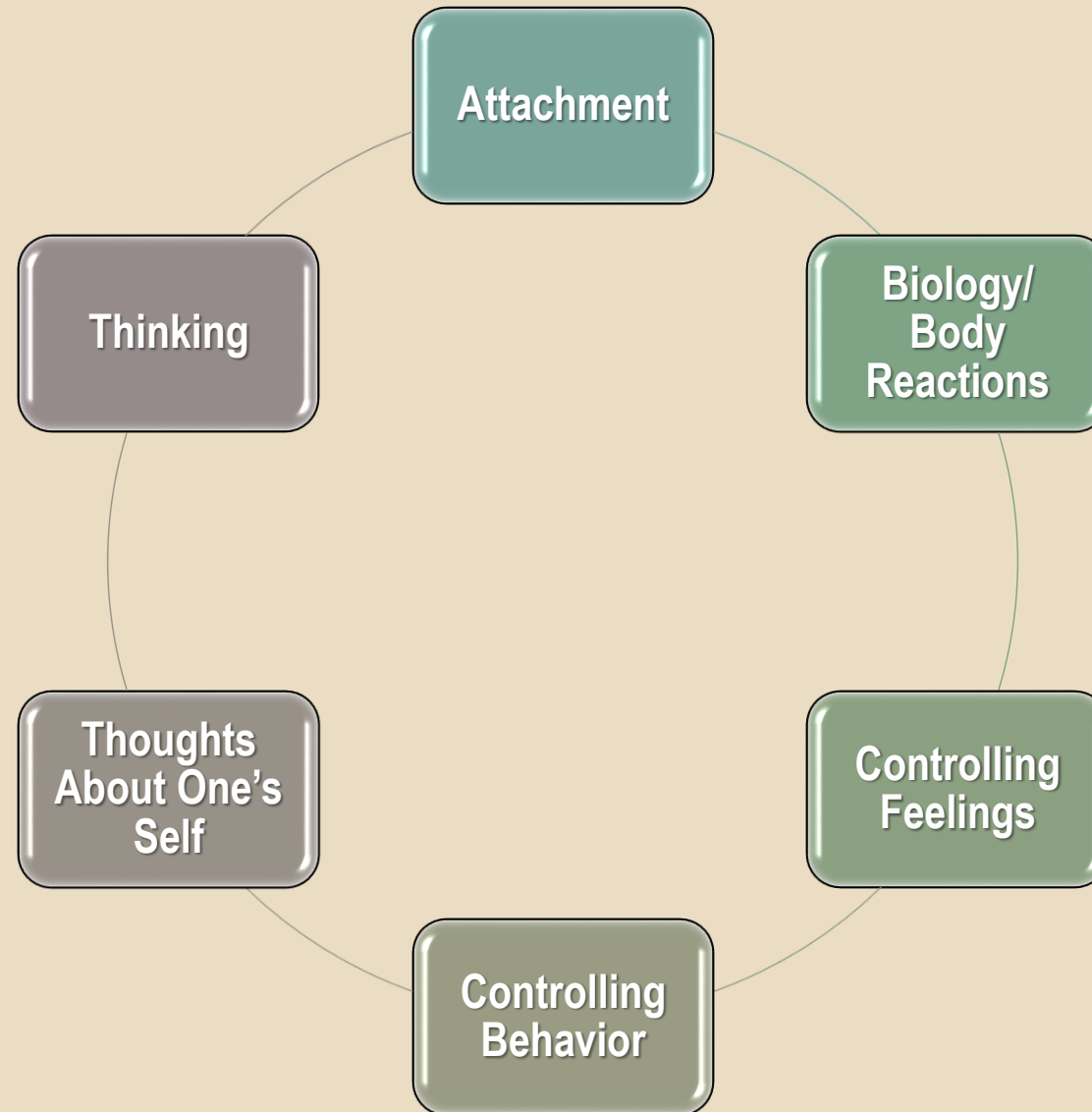
# TRAUMA: DEVELOPMENTS MISSING STAIRS

- Traumatic events at any age and stage of development can interfere with a child's developmental accomplishments.
- Children who experience multiple traumatic events over long periods of time are especially likely to have multiple gaps in their development.





# OUTCOMES OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES



# TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

- Intrusive Symptoms
  - Memories, nightmares, dissociations, flashbacks
- Avoidance
  - Of memories or external stimuli (person, place, object)
- Negative Alteration in Cognition and Mood
  - Negative beliefs, distorted cognitions, negative emotional state
- Arousal
  - Irritability, outbursts, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response

# DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS

- Sad and depressed mood often
- Diminished pleasure in activities
- Eating difficulties – Increase or decrease in appetite
- Sleep difficulties – Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Consistently agitated
- Loss of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of hopelessness and even death – low self-esteem

# SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

WEIGHT CHANGE



SLEEP DISTURBANCE



FATIGUE



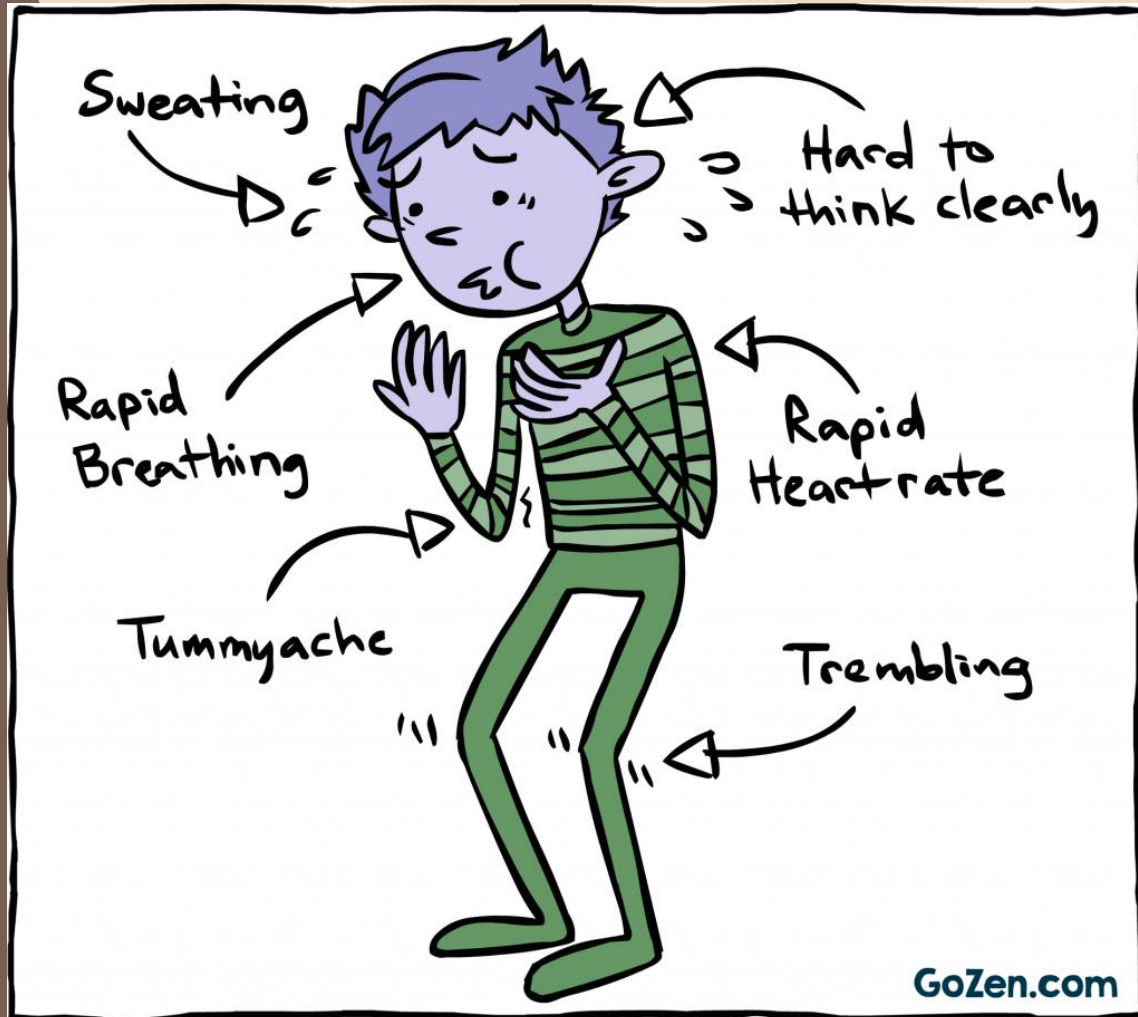
CONCENTRATION



IF YOU'RE GOING TO GET ANY JOY OUT OF BEING DEPRESSED, YOU'VE GOT TO STAND LIKE THIS..



# ANXIETY SYMPTOMS



- Feelings that the future is unpredictable & uncontrollable
- Anticipation of the negative
- Apprehension & anticipatory distress
- Avoidance
- Significant Physiological Symptoms

# ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)



- Inattention

- Dislikes task requiring sustained mental effort
- Difficulty sustaining attention and becomes distracted easily
- Makes careless mistakes
- Does not listen when spoken to
- Difficulty organizing tasks
- Difficulty problem solving
- Loses items easily

**They say I have A.D.H.D.  
but I dont really feel...  
-Oh look,  
a bunny!**



# ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

- Hyperactivity/Impulsivity

- Fidgets, squirms in seat
- Gets out of seat when expected to remain seated
- Acts as if “driven by a motor”
- Runs around or climbs when expected to be still
- Unable to be quiet during leisure activities
- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers before question is completed
- Intrudes and interrupts activities and conversations



3 OUT OF 4



teens in high school admit to using alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine or prescription drugs

Illegal drug addiction can cost teens up to

\$180,000

PER YEAR



45%

of all high-school students in America regularly use illegal substances





# **THERAPY CONSIDERATIONS**

# ASSESSMENT

- Thorough assessment of concerning symptoms
- Qualified mental health professional
- Multiple Informants
  - Caregiver (bio, foster, or adoptive parent)
  - Youth
  - Teacher
  - Caseworker

# PSYCHOTHERAPY

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Effective in addressing majority of childhood mental health symptoms
- Focus on:
  - Psychoeducation
  - Development of coping skills such as relaxation, affect modulation, and cognitive coping
  - Problem solving
  - Exposure exercises

# PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

- ADHD medications
  - Medications like Adderall, Ritalin, Focalin, Vyvanse, Concerta
  - Act by complex mechanisms in brain including dopamine release
  - Treat ADHD by improving focus, attention and impulsivity
  - No long-term side effects; may cause some mild side effects like stomachaches and headaches, weight loss, sleep disturbances
  - Avoid over-dosing – may cause more serious issues like psychosis
  - Risk of abuse and addiction

# PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

- Antidepressants/Anti-anxiety medications
  - Medications like Prozac, Zoloft, Celexa, Lexapro, Wellbutrin
  - Older antidepressants: Amitriptyline, Imipramine
  - Generally act by normalizing serotonin and norepinephrine functioning in the brain
  - Used to treat depression, anxiety and trauma symptoms
  - Side effects are generally mild; may include GI disturbances, headaches, some weight gain, black-box warning of increasing SI

# PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

- Mood Stabilizers

- Medications like Lithium, Valproate (Depakote), Lamictal, Tegretol
- Used to treat mania, bipolar disorder, impulse control disorders and severe mood swings
- Side effects are variable, sometimes serious- skin rash, GI upset, sedation, weight gain, liver/thyroid/kidney effects, birth effects

# PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

- Antipsychotics
  - Includes 2<sup>nd</sup> generation: Abilify, Risperidone, Seroquel, Olanzapine
  - 1<sup>st</sup> generation: Haldol, Thorazine, Prolixin, Pimozide
  - Used to treat schizophrenia, hallucinations, delusions
  - Abilify and Risperidone indicated to treat severe aggression in individuals with autism
  - Serious side effects include weight gain, prolactin elevation, movement disorders, effects on heart, seizures

NOT  
“WHAT’S  
WRONG  
WITH THIS  
CHILD?”

**THANK YOU!**

BUT  
“WHAT HAS  
HAPPENED  
TO THIS  
CHILD?”

**QUESTIONS?**