

Understanding the Impact of Trauma in Developing Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs for Tribal Youth

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Webinar

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Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Family and Youth Services Bureau
Tribal Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP)





Introductions

Objectives

- Define trauma, including historical trauma;
- Provide an overview of the biological responses to stress and trauma;
- Recognize how trauma (including from teen dating violence) presents itself in Tribal communities;
- Understand the effects of trauma on individuals' ability to absorb prevention messaging; and
- Describe trauma-informed services and discuss how to create a trauma-informed environment.



First, find your right distance...

What Do We Mean by “Trauma”?

Individual Trauma: Trauma is the **unique individual experience of an event or enduring condition**, in which:

- The individual experiences a threat to life or to his or her psychic or bodily integrity (or to a loved one)
- The individual’s coping capacity and/or ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed

Collective Trauma

- Cultural and historical trauma can impact individuals and communities across generations

What Do We Mean by “Historical Trauma”?

- Historical trauma is the cumulative emotional, psychological and spiritual wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences
- The collective traumas of colonization affect nearly 100% of Indigenous Peoples

Historical Context of Trauma

- **Contact**
- **Genocide**
- **Violence against women and children**
- **Forced removal**
- **Boarding schools**
- **Removal of children**
- **Sterilization**
- **Changing federal policies**
- **Reservations**
- **Oppression**



Understanding Trauma and Its Effects

Trauma theory

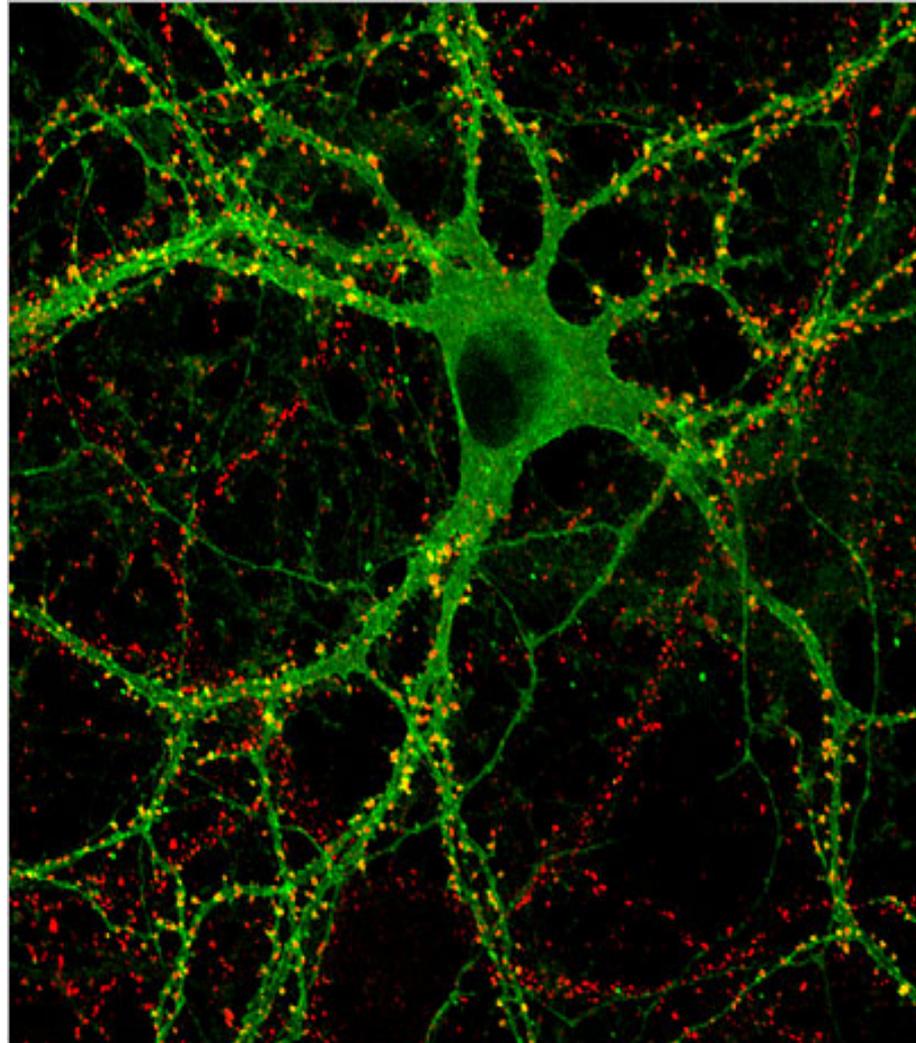
Development, attachment,
neurobiology & social context

Understanding the Traumatic Effects of Abuse

Why a Developmental Framework Is Important

- Our brains grow in relation to our experience
- The nature and quality of those experiences help to shape our development

Our Brains Are Made Up of Billions of Nerve Cells with Trillions of Connections



Thompson K, Gradinaru V, Deisseroth K., Stanford University
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Impact of Experience on Brain Development: Brain Development Requires Stimulation

- Experience stimulates certain brain pathways
- Those consistently stimulated are strengthened
- Genes and experience work together but play different roles
- Genes provide the basic wiring plan
- Experience fine-tunes brain architecture

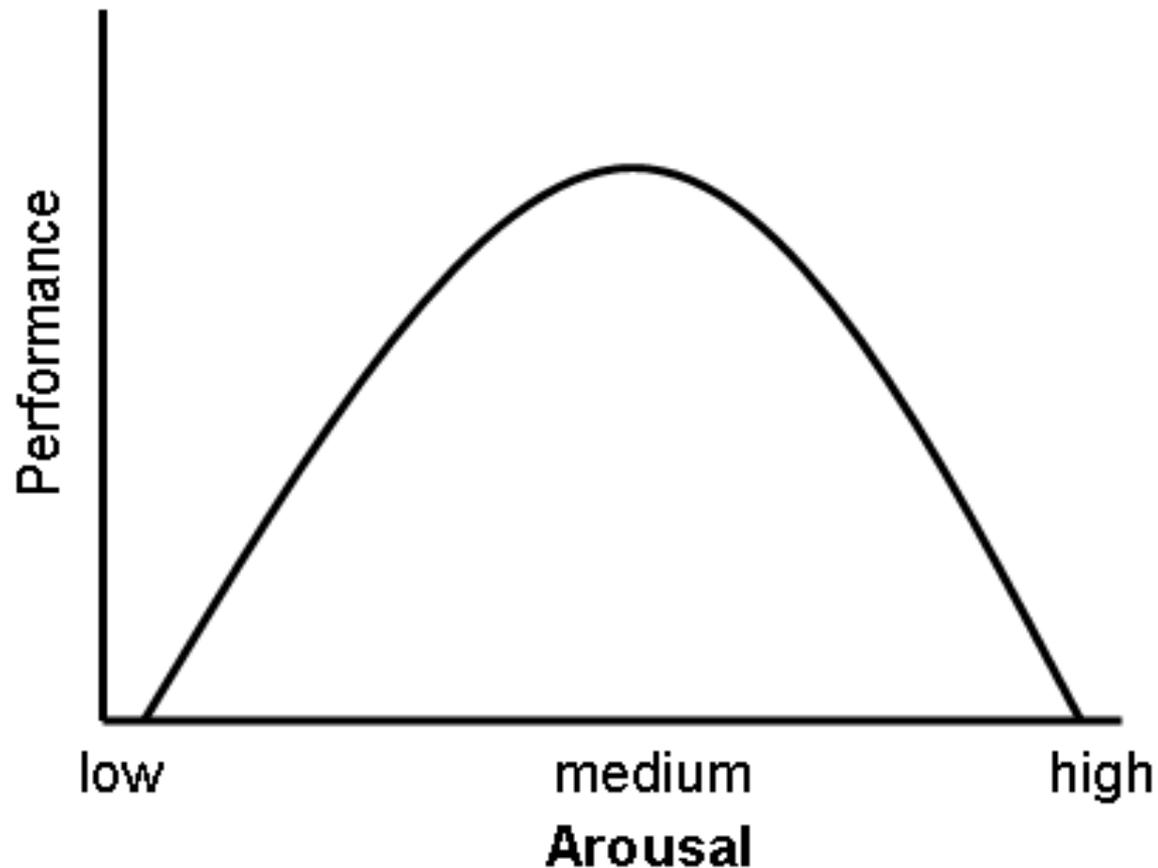
Understanding Trauma: Importance of Early Attachment Relationships

- Model for future relationships and trust
- Important source of resilience and ability to manage stress
- Template for developing self-regulating, integrative and empathic capacities
- Active throughout life

How Does This Translate? Impact of Trauma on the Brain

- **Stress**
- **Traumatic stress**
- **Complex trauma**

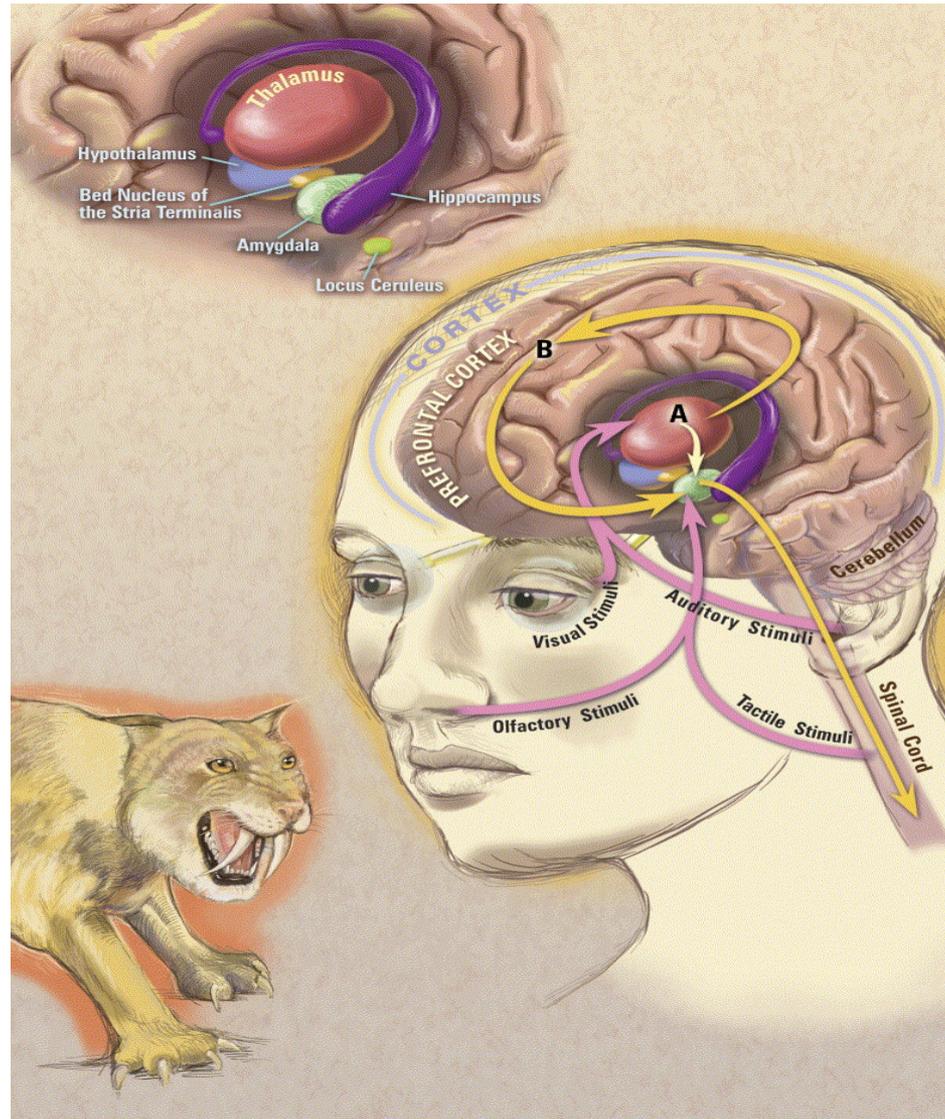
Optimal Stress: Yerkes-Dodson Curve



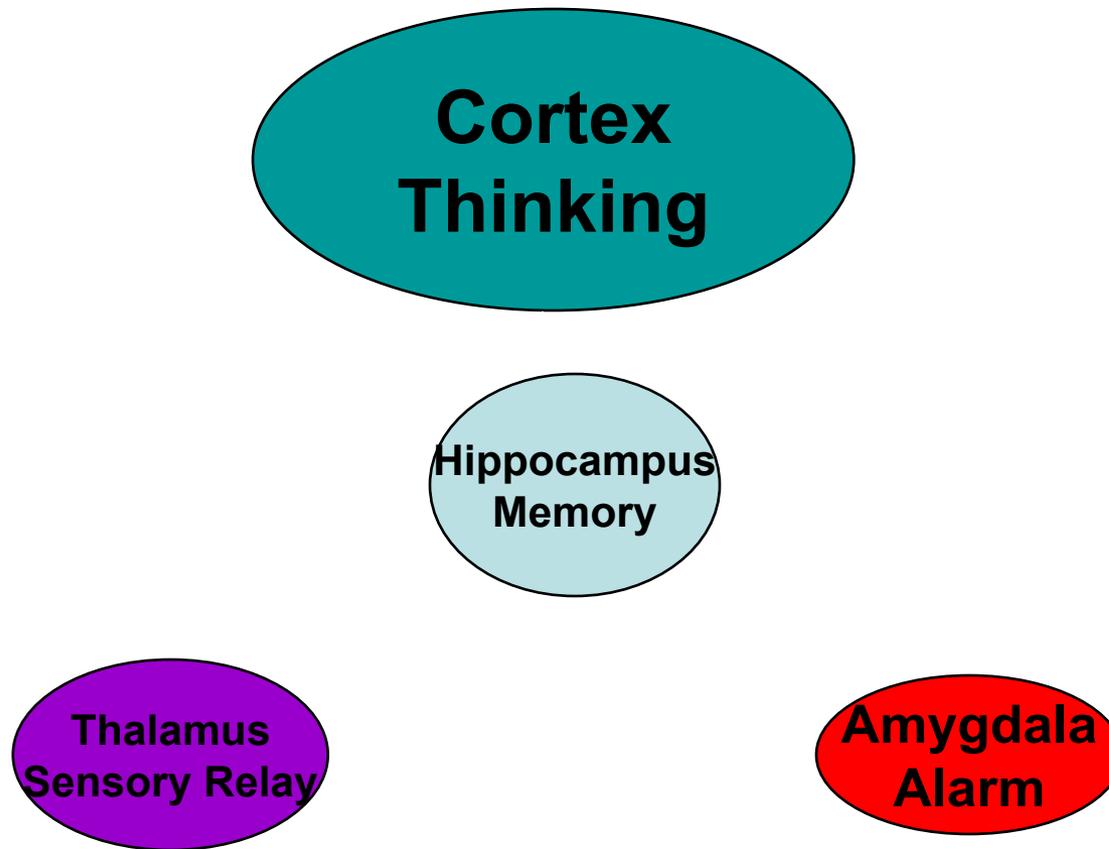
Normal Stress Response

- **Necessary for growth and survival**
 - Sensory input to brain of potential threat
 - Mobilizes rapid response/state of arousal:
 - Fight, flight or freeze; intense focus on immediate danger and/or dissociation
 - Neurochemical cascade to mobilize response
 - Higher brain centers then evaluate threat, take appropriate action or disregard
 - Return to baseline

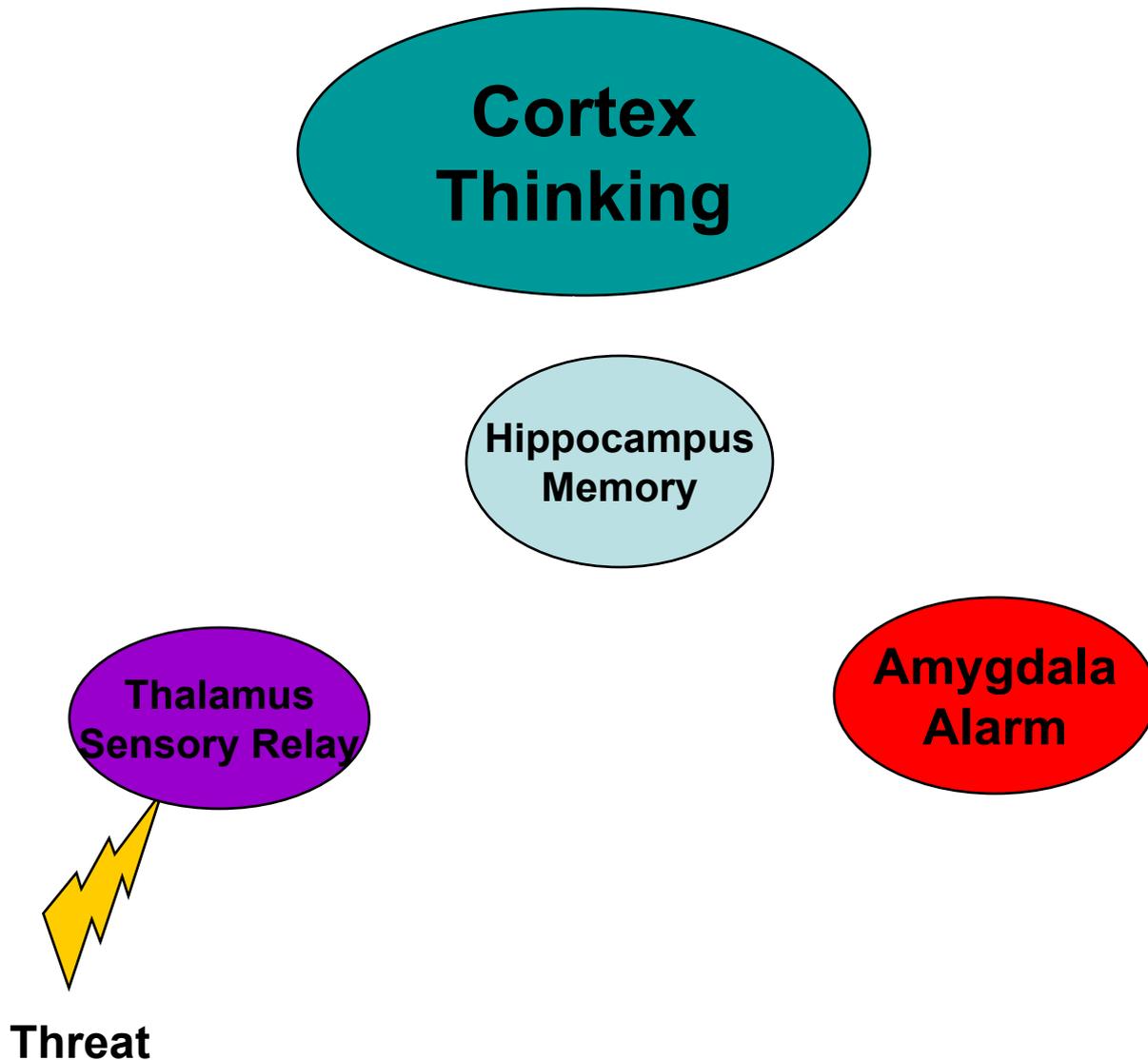
Stress Response: Fight, Flight, or Freeze



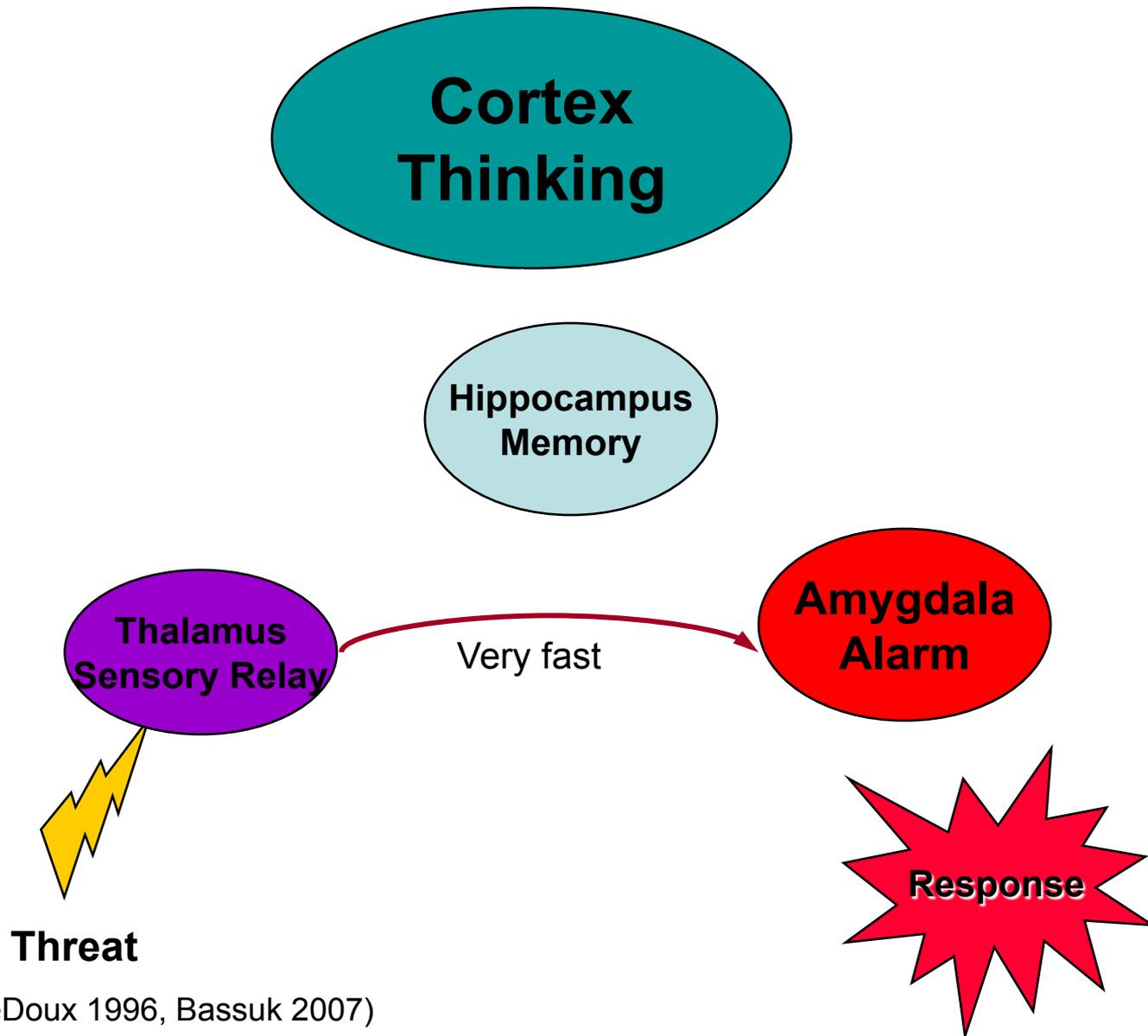
Normal Stress Response



Normal Stress Response

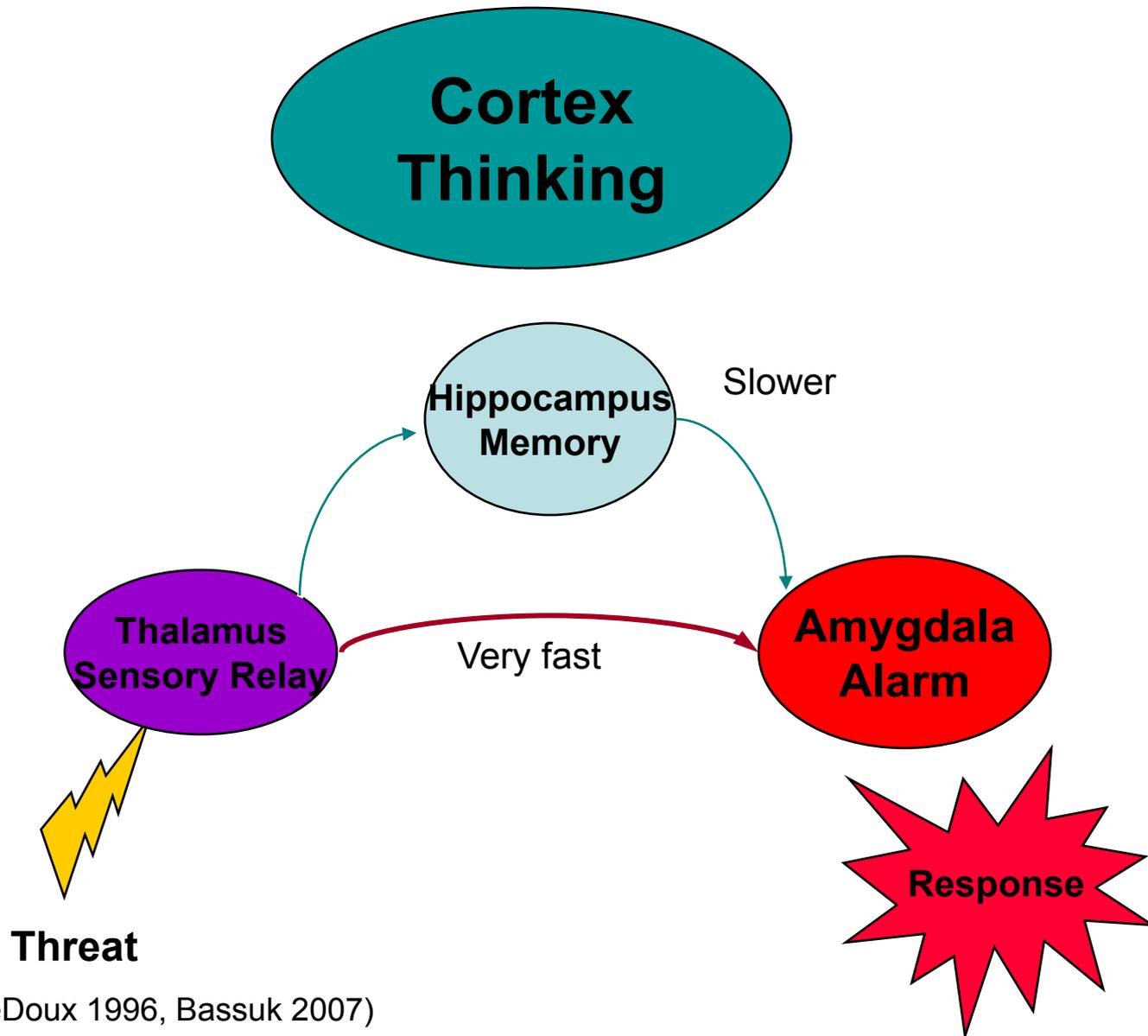


Normal Stress Response



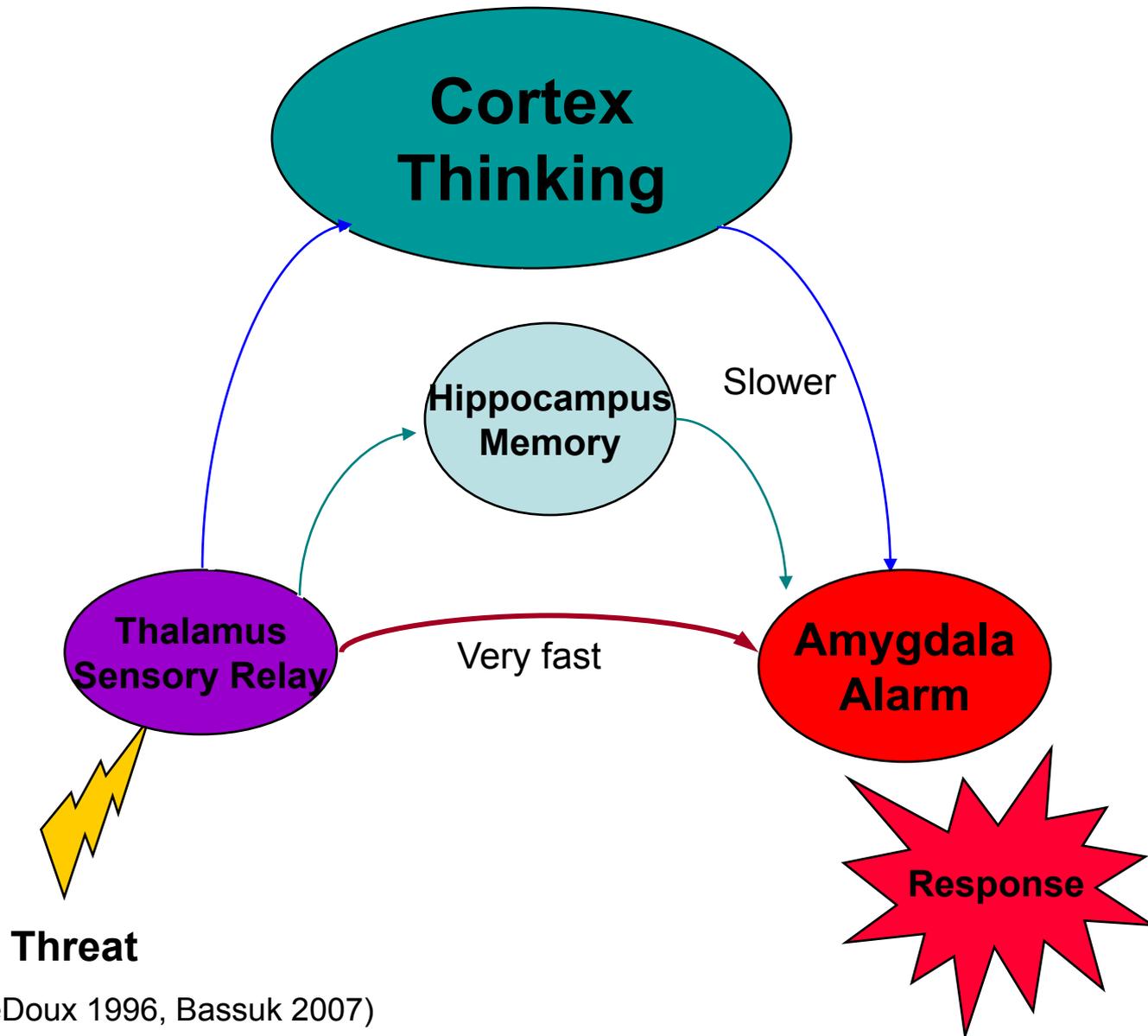
(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)

Normal Stress Response



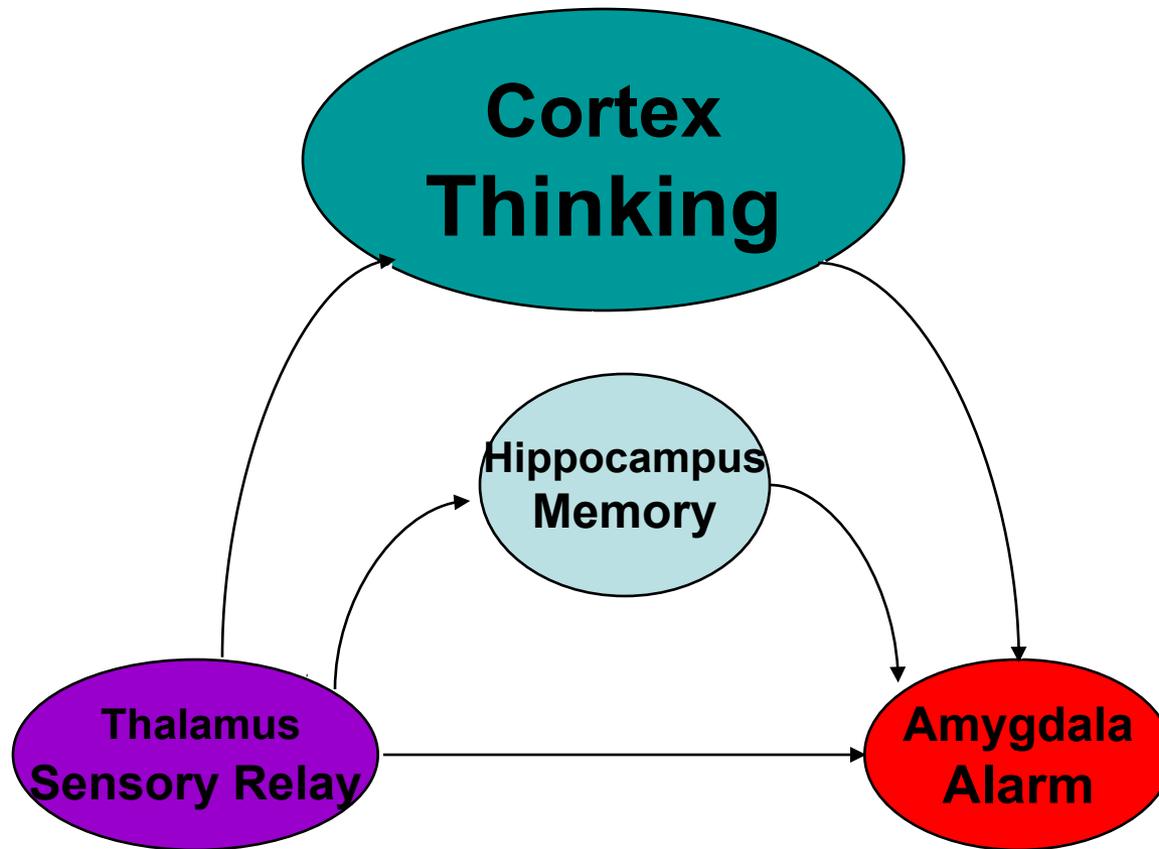
(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)

Normal Stress Response



(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)

Normal Stress Response



**Back to
Baseline**

What Does Stress Do?

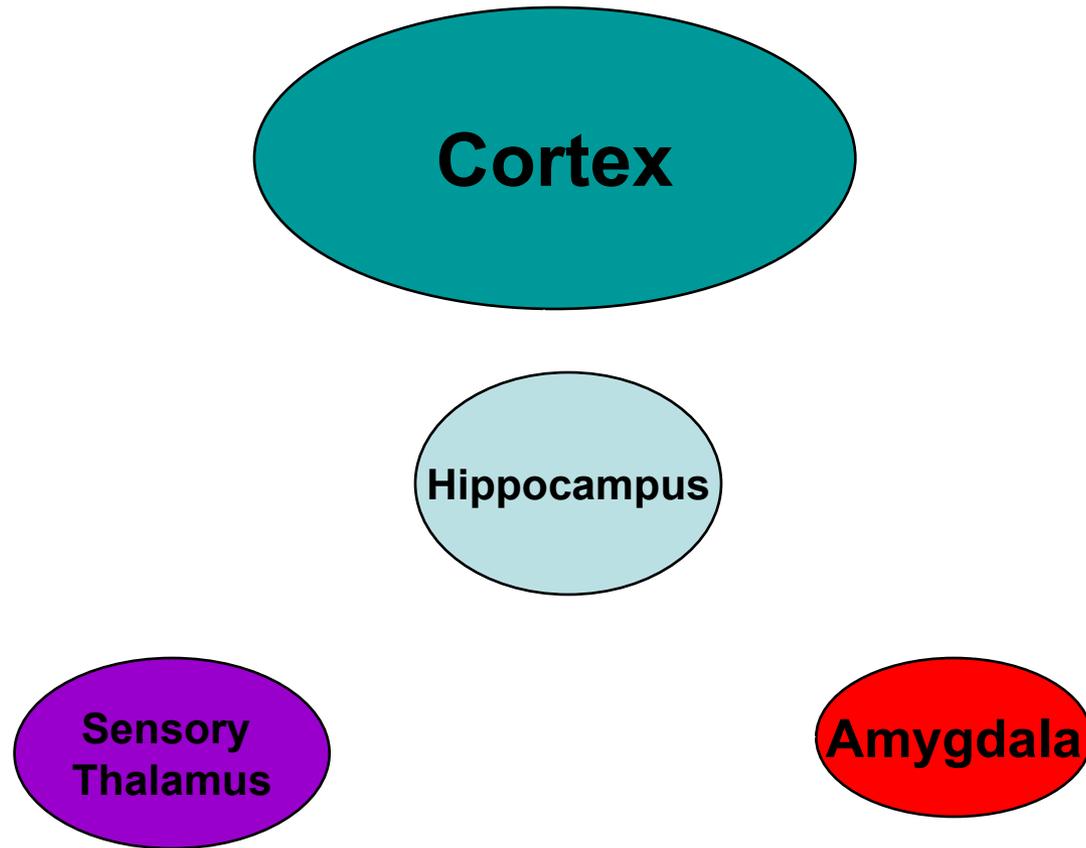
Shifts people away from emotional balance and predictability and calls on our system to restore it

What Does Traumatic Stress Do?

Shifts people away from emotional safety and predictability, and disrupts our system's ability to restore it

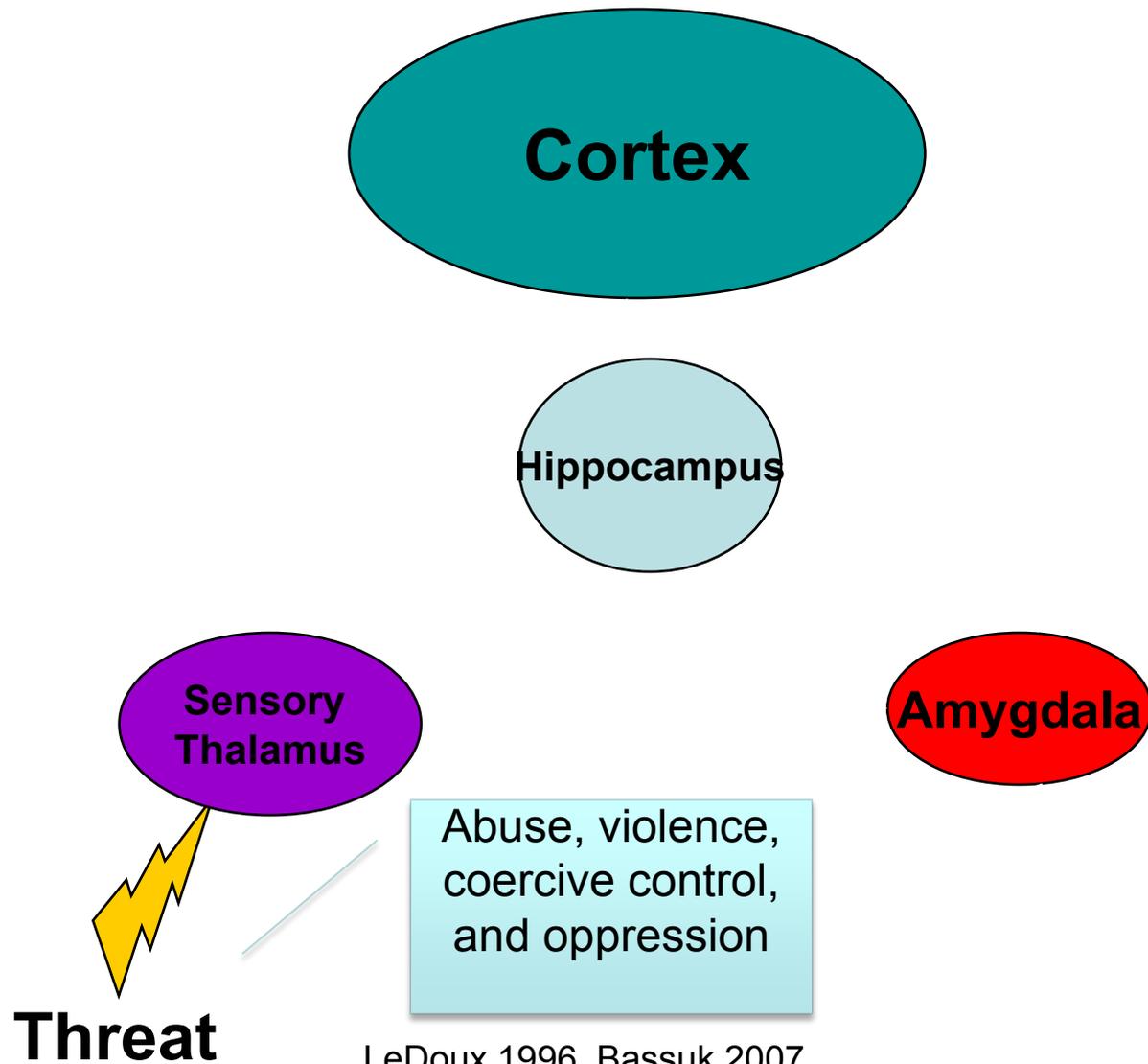
Traumatic Stress Response

Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways



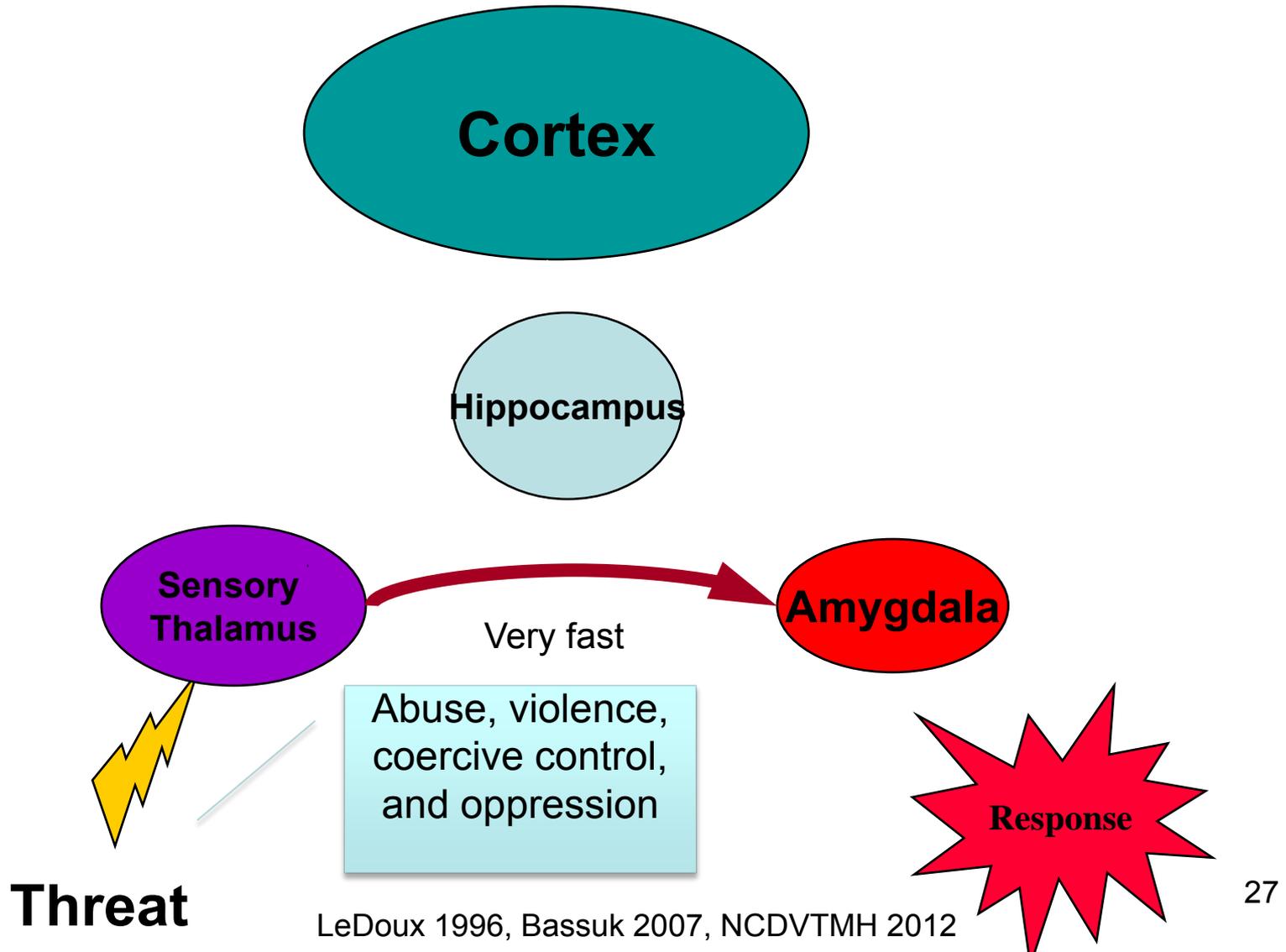
Traumatic Stress Response

Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways



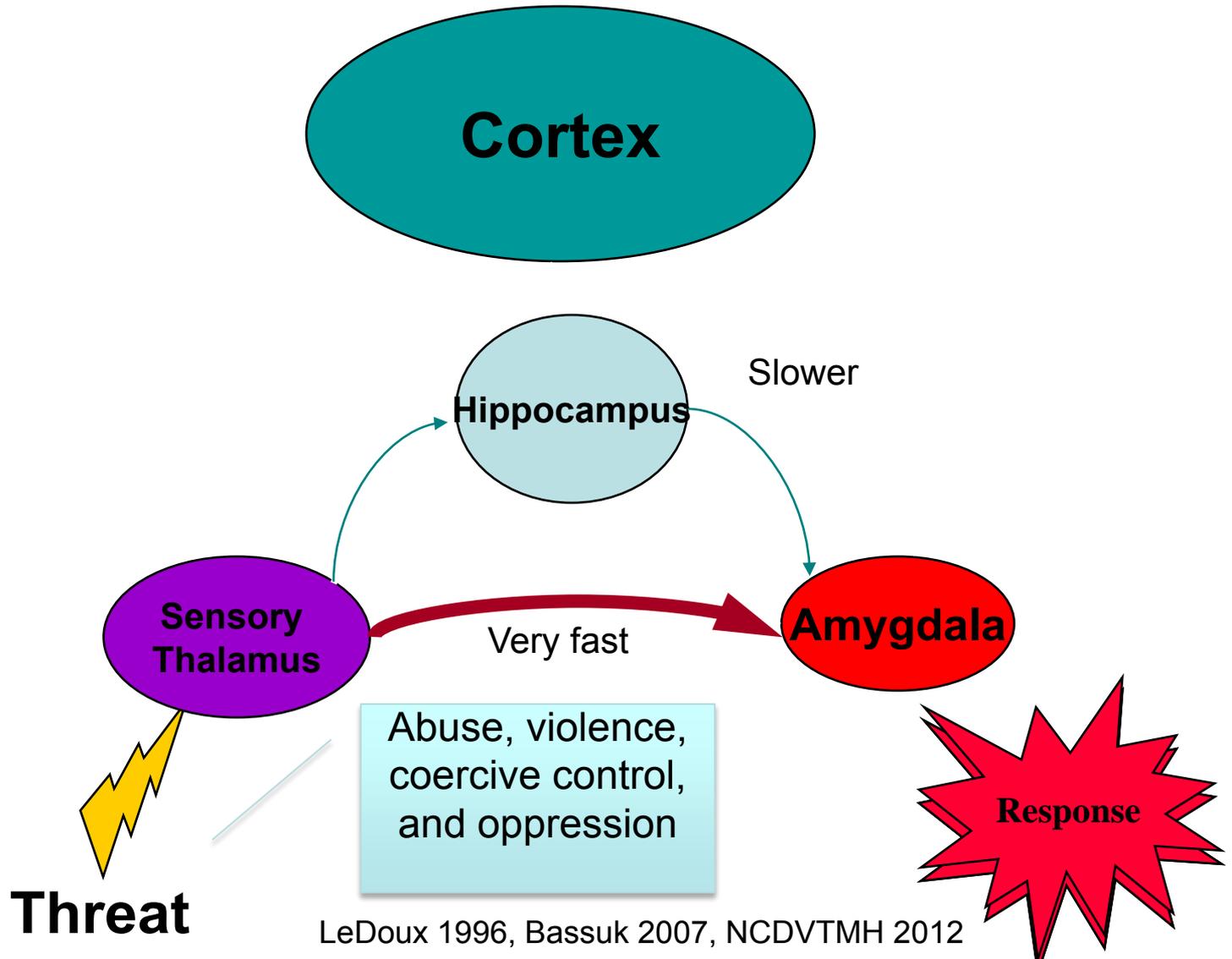
Traumatic Stress Response

Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways



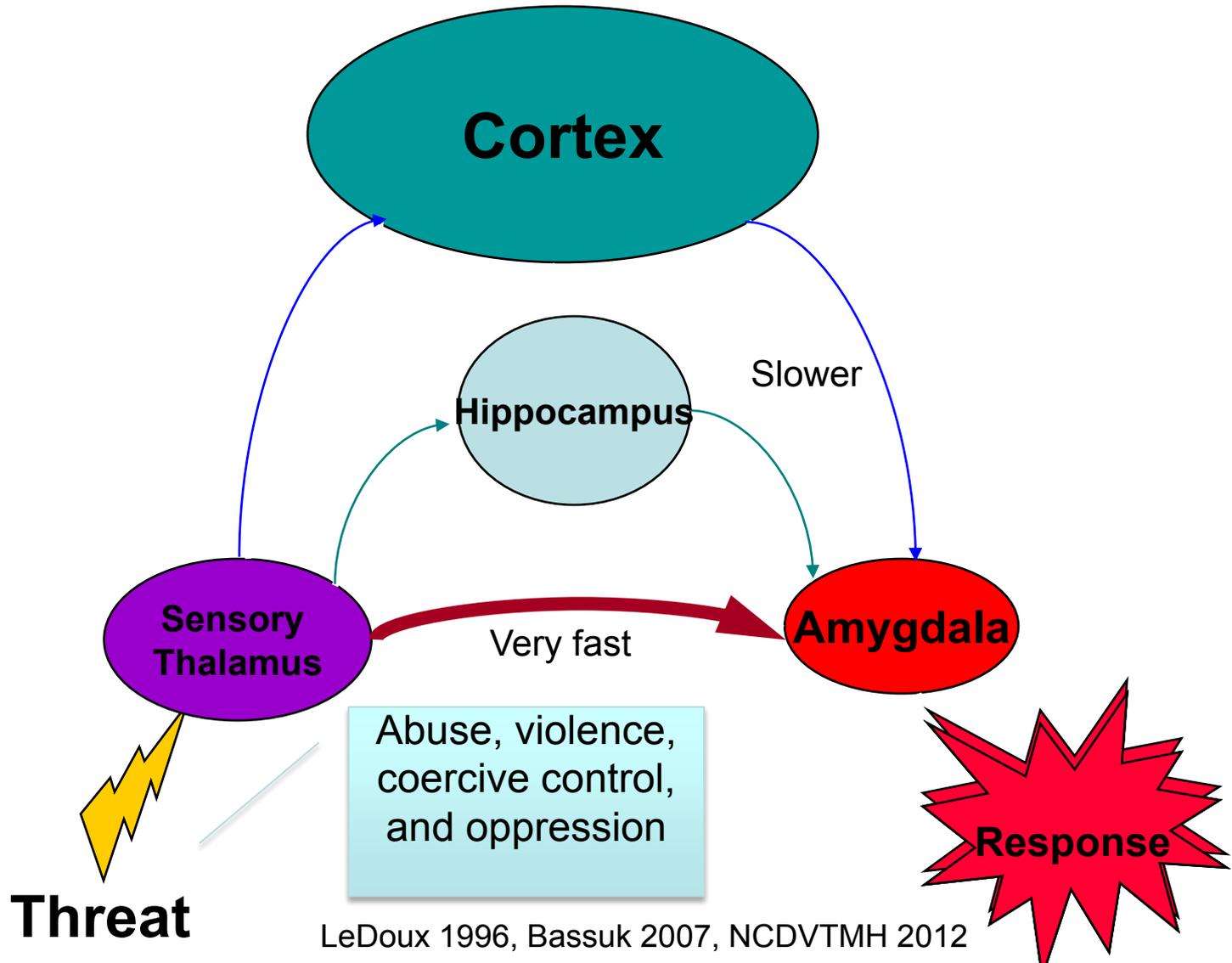
Traumatic Stress Response

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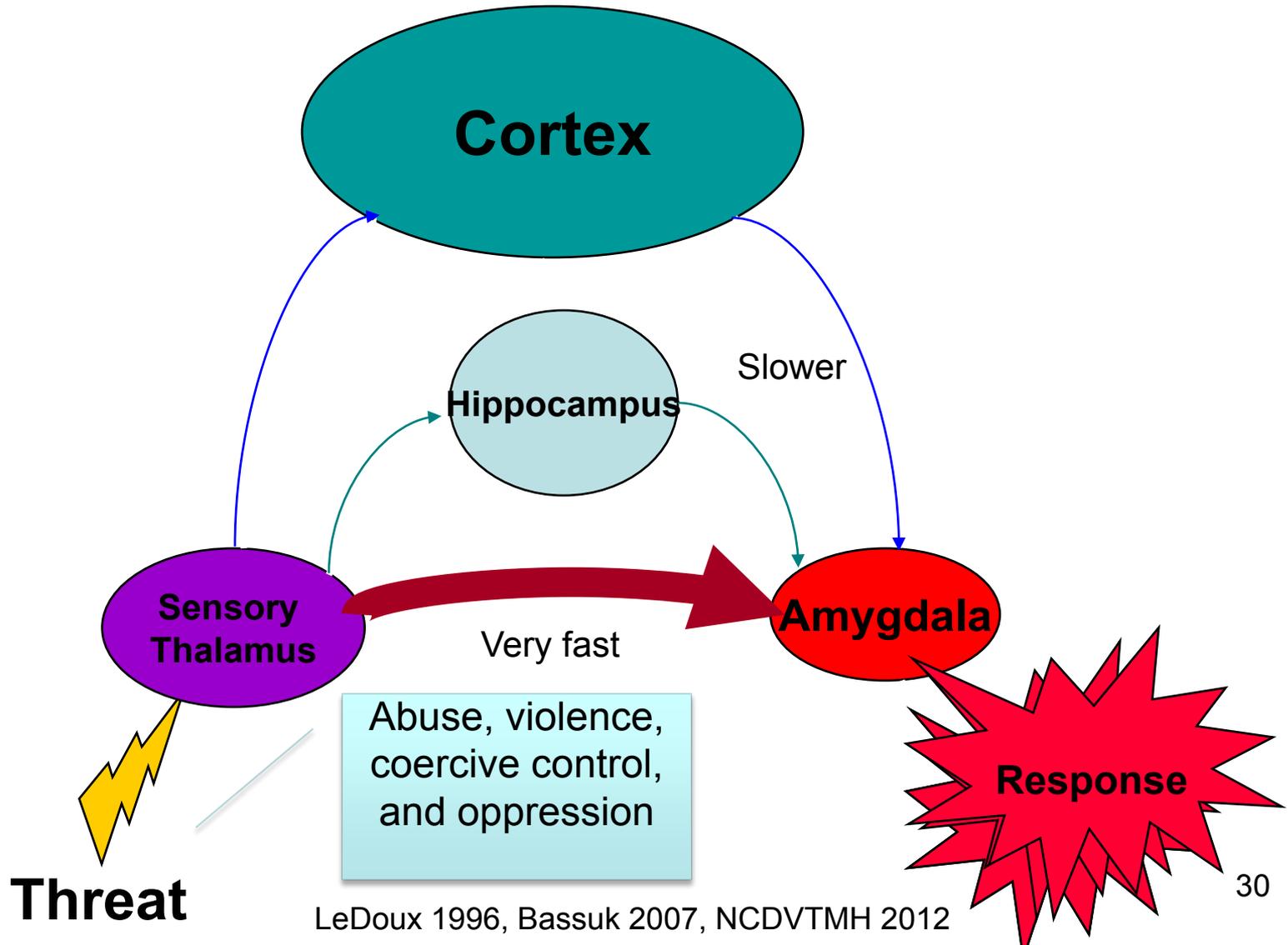
Traumatic Stress Response

Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways



Traumatic Stress Response

Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways



Trauma & Dissociation

- A physiological response to danger and threat
- A psychological coping strategy used to protect oneself from overwhelming experiences
- A separation of mental processes and contents (e.g., thoughts, images, and sensations) that would ordinarily be connected
- The over-modulation of fear pathways

Trauma Can Lead to Changes in Arousal, Attention, Perception, and Emotion

May move between extremes....

Arousal-Extreme excitability response to stimuli **or** numbing-detachment from the world

Hyper-arousal  Numbing

Attention-Directed away from stimuli-completely absent **or** deeply, exclusively focused

Dissociation  Hyper-focus

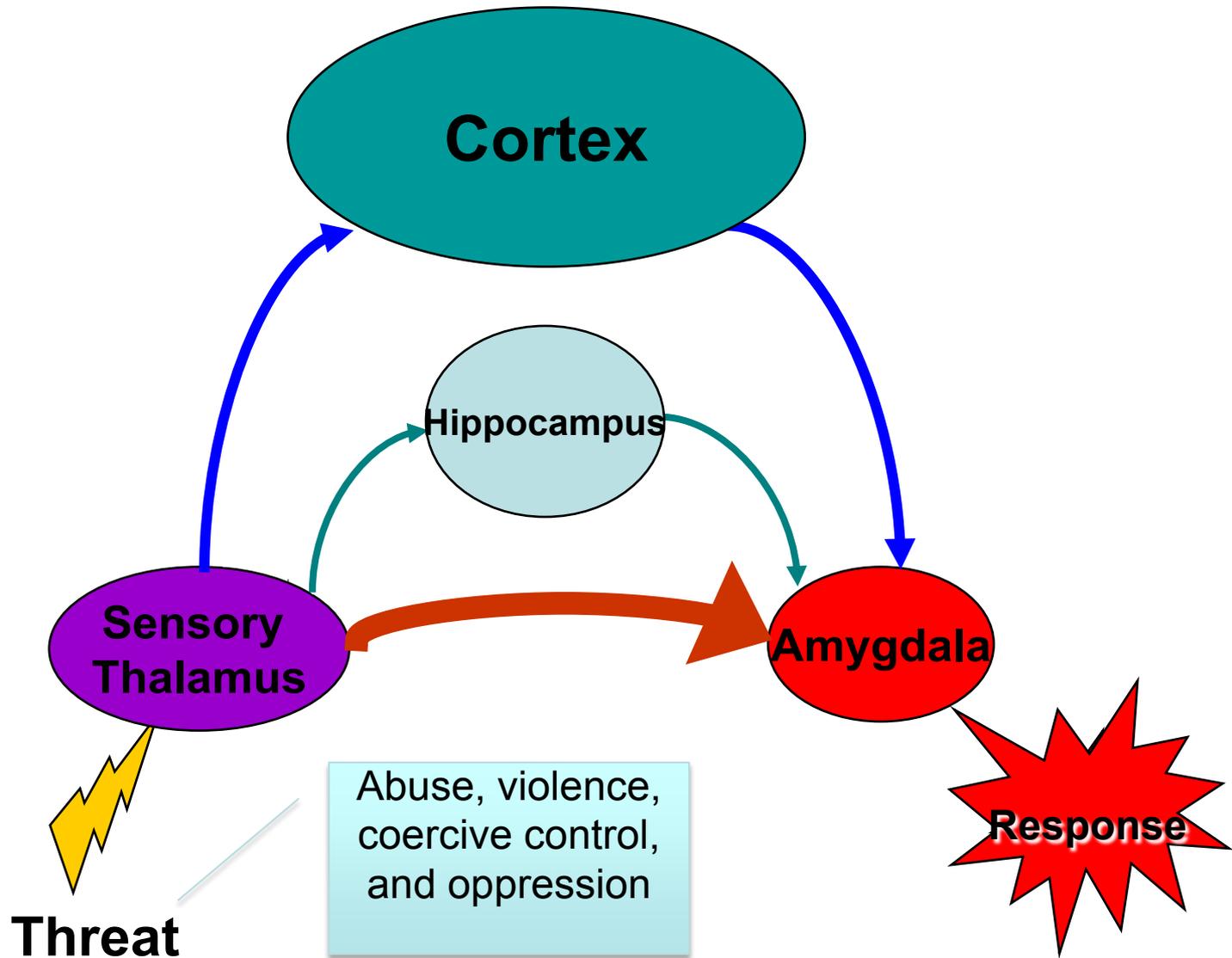
Perception-Pupils dilated, vision and hearing sharpened **or** dulled with memory absent

Heightened  Dulled

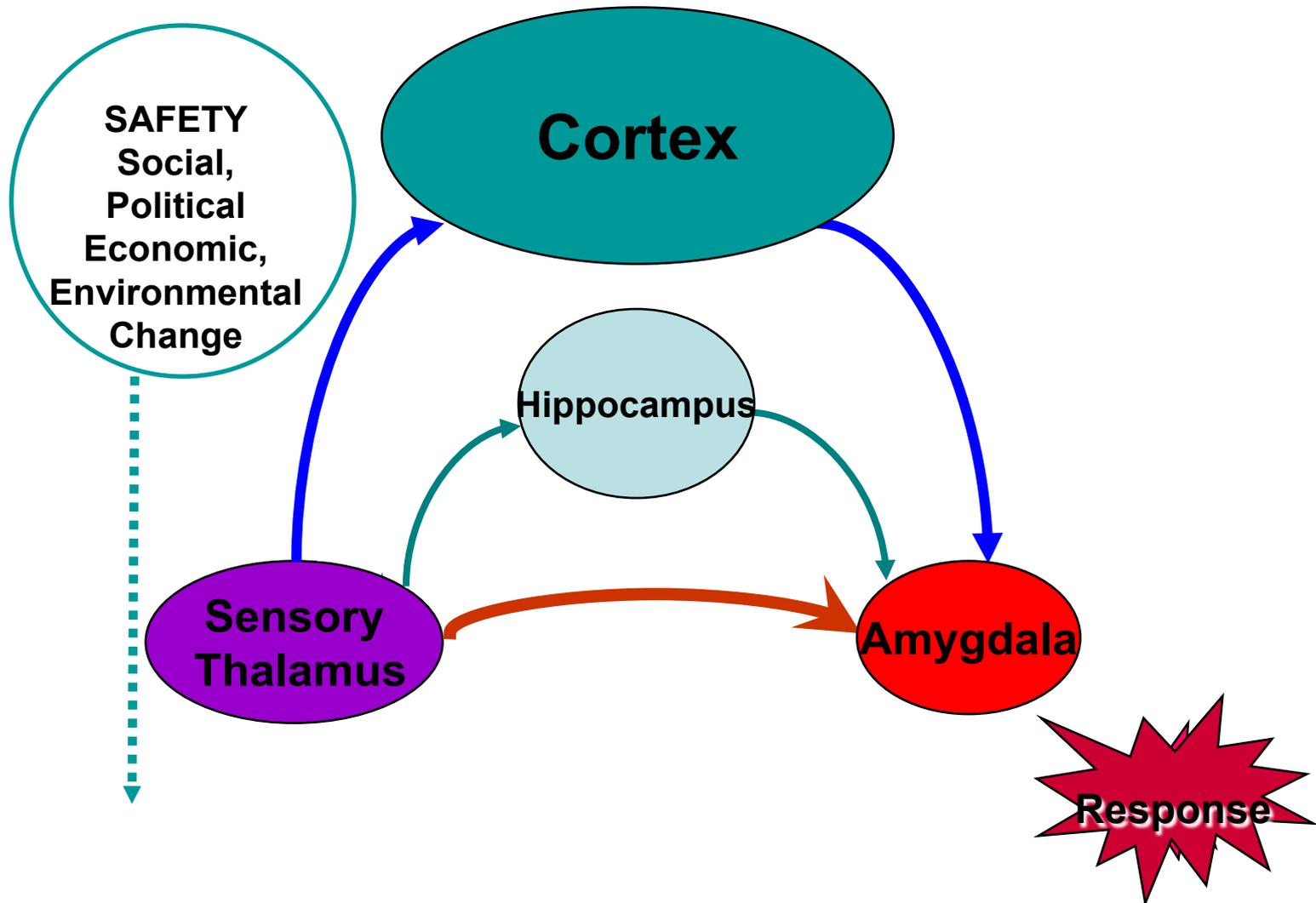
Emotion-Devastating, painful feelings **or** inappropriately detached from experience

Absent  Overwhelming

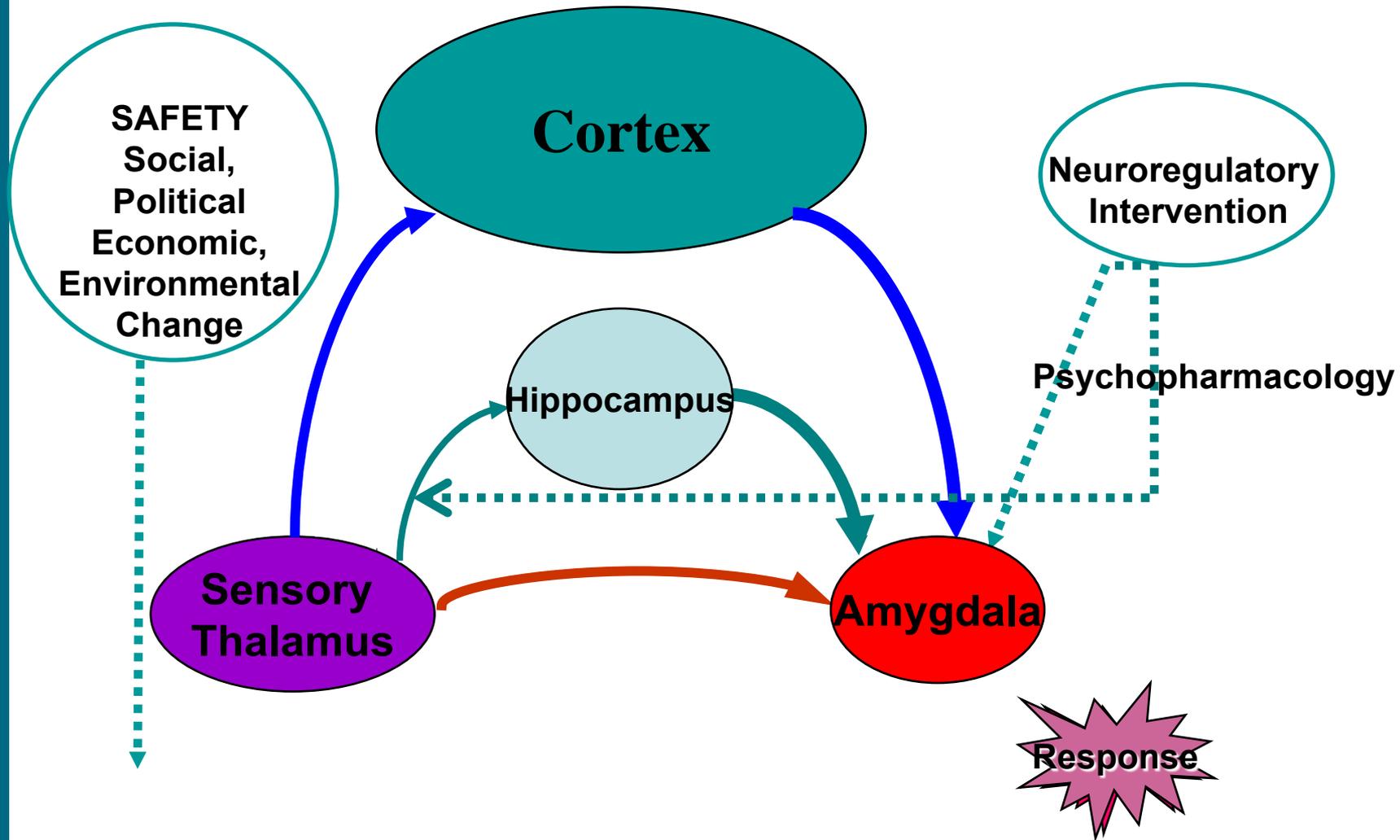
Neurobiology of Abuse, Trauma & Oppression



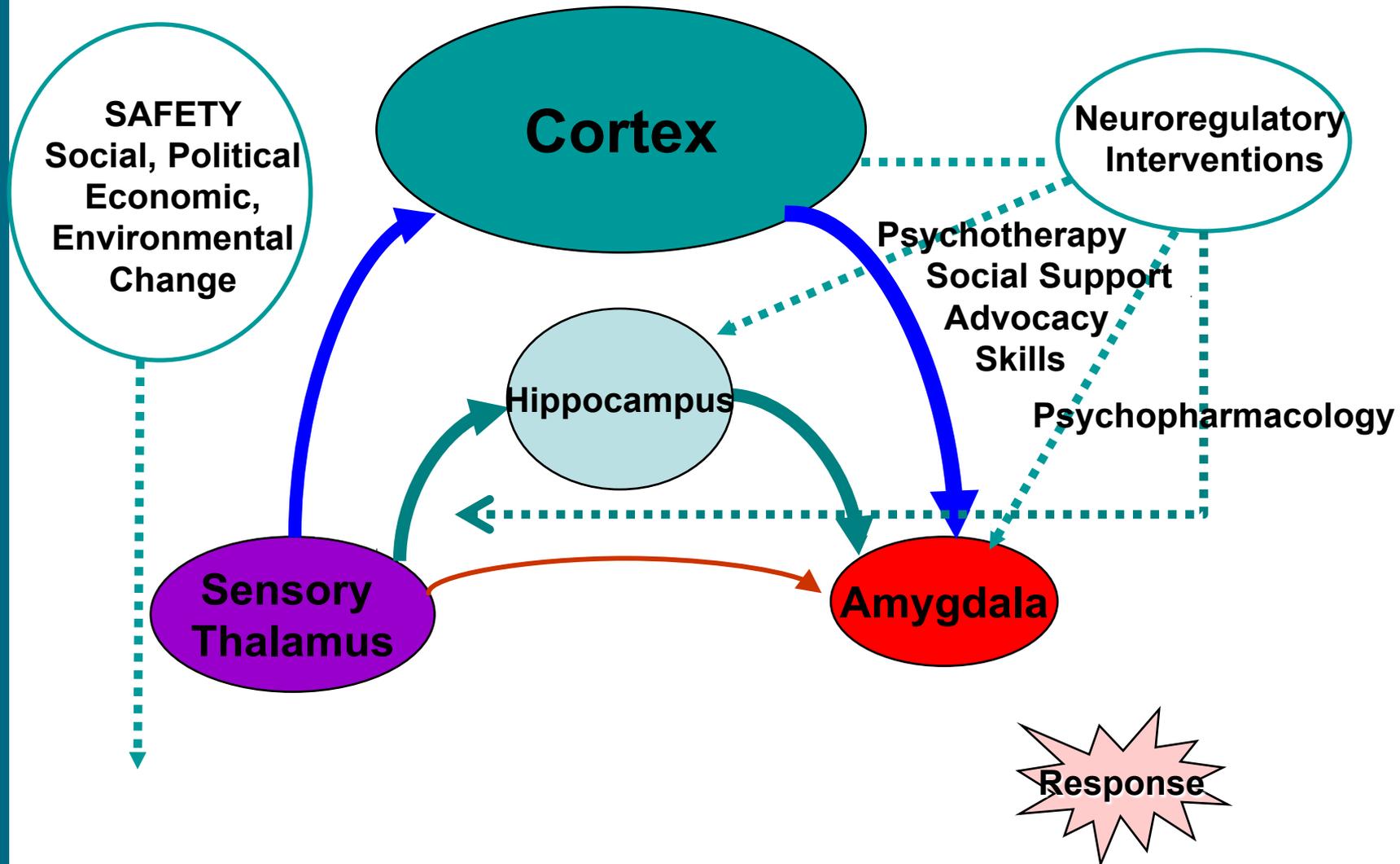
How Interventions Help



How Interventions Help



How Interventions Help



How Does this Translate?

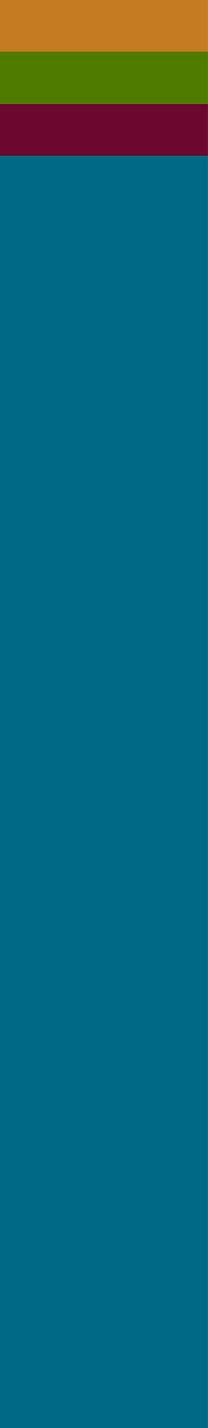
Understanding the Impact of Trauma

Trauma can affect our capacity to:

- **Trust other people**
 - Harder to reach out for or respond to help
- **Trust ourselves**
 - Experience ourselves as deserving and worthwhile
 - Solve problems, exercise judgment, process information
 - Take initiative, thoughtfully plan
- **Manage internal states** in ways that do not create other difficulties or increase risk
 - Stay present and connected

Summary

- Brain develops in relation to early relationships and experiences
- Neglect, stress and trauma particularly at hands of caregivers impact development
- There are many opportunities to counteract these effects

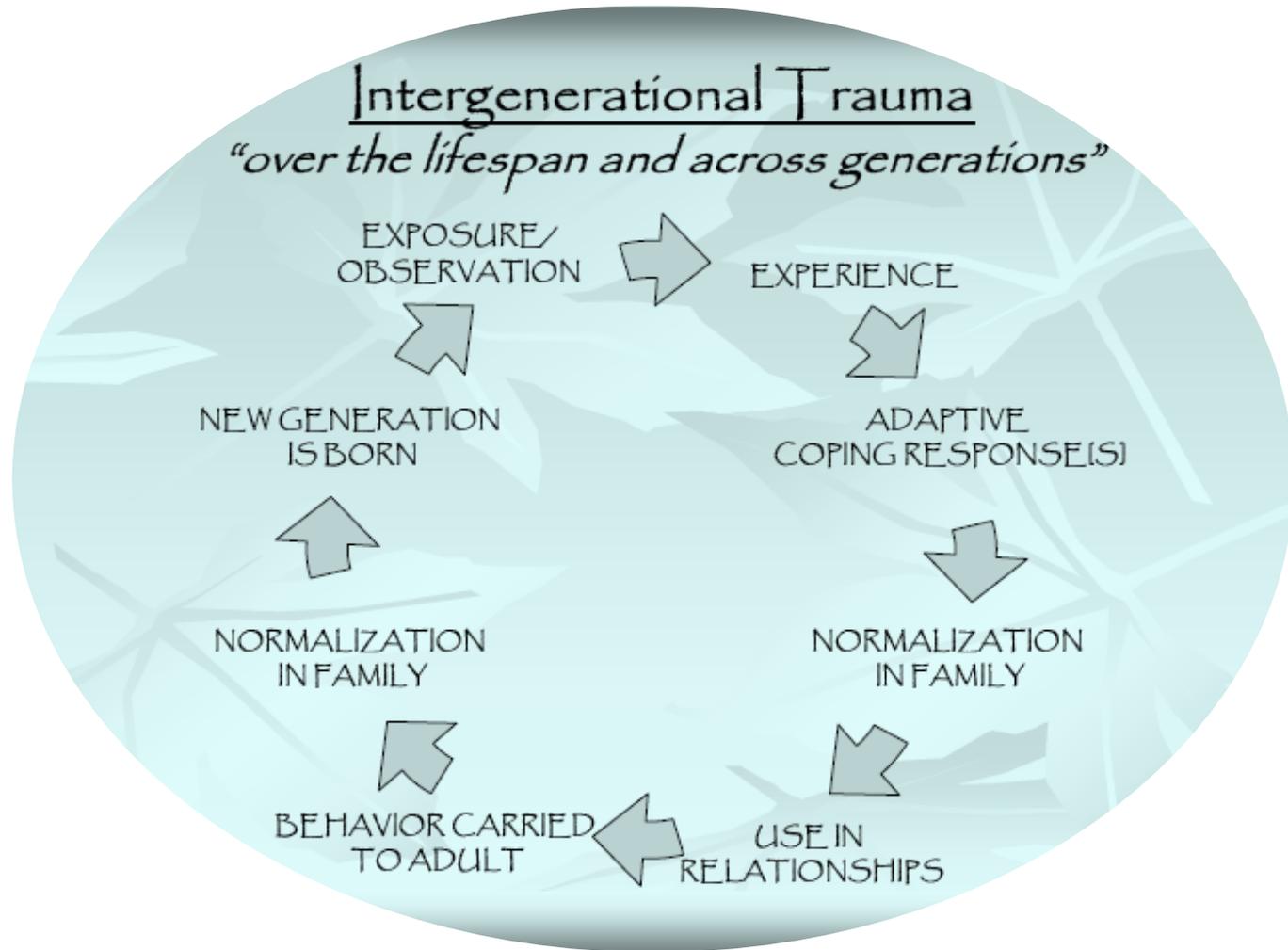


How Trauma Presents Itself in Tribal Communities

Historical Trauma Response

- **Child abuse and/or neglect**
- **Racism**
- **Bloodism**
- **Bullying/lateral violence**
- **Crime or antisocial behavior**
- **Mental health impacts**
- **Addiction/substance abuse**
- **Physical illness**
- **Sexual abuse**
- **Chronic depression and/or suicide**
- **Disconnection from education system**
- **Internalized oppression**
- **Family violence**

Intergenerational Trauma





Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the Context of Historical Trauma

Adverse Childhood Exposures and Alcohol Dependence among 7 Native American Tribes

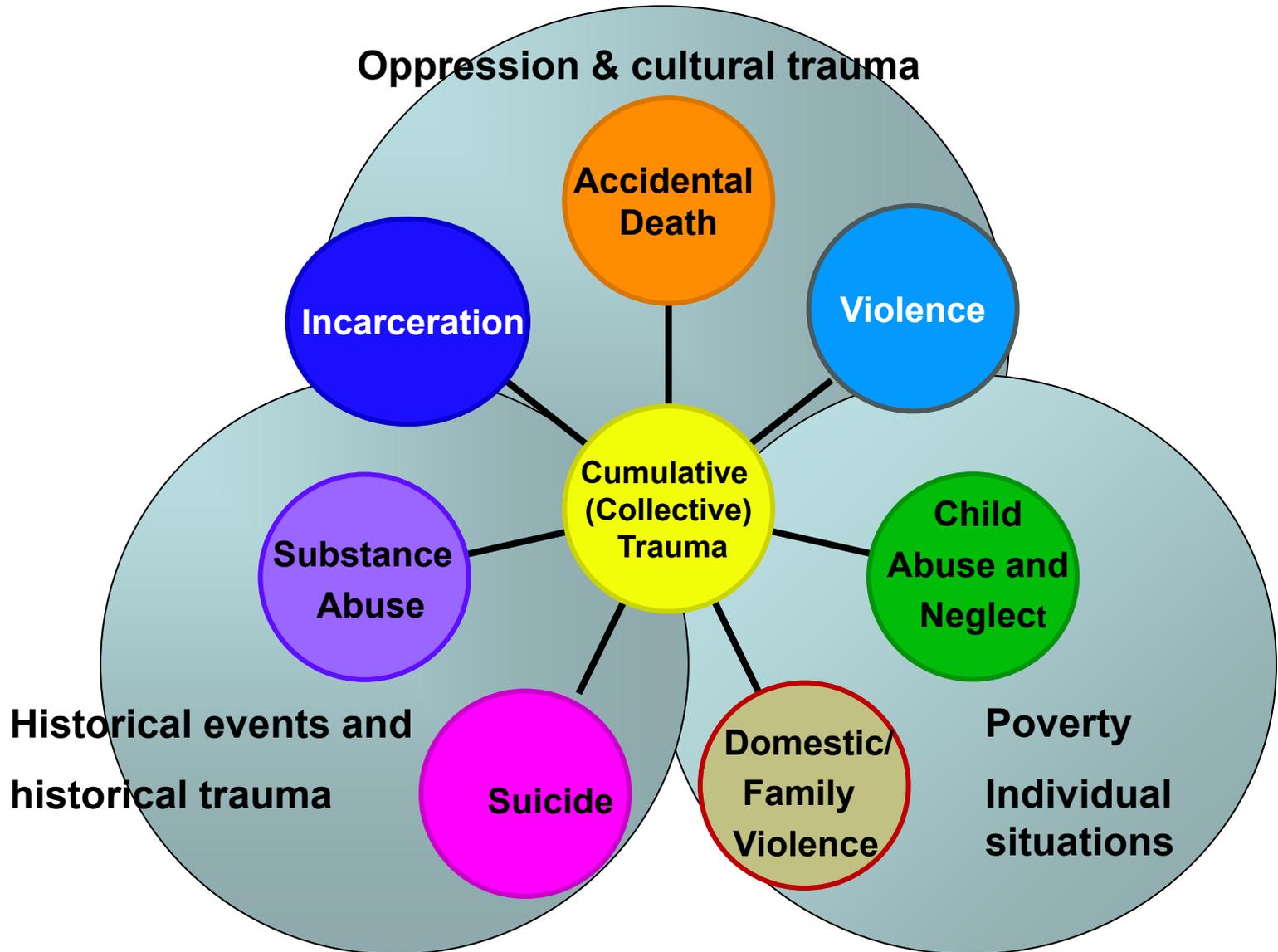
N = 1660

- 10 categories of adverse childhood experiences: boarding school, foster care and adoption added and cultural variables assessed
- 86% of participants experienced one or more categories of exposure, and 33% reported four or more categories
- Strong relationship between childhood sexual abuse and subsequent drinking problems among the general population; similar in AI/AN population
- Significant Tribal differences in rates of alcohol dependence and adverse childhood exposures
- Lifetime prevalence of alcohol dependence was high among all tribes but one

AI/AN ACE Study

- High rates of alcohol dependence were associated with one or more types of adverse childhood experiences
 - Men: 74%–100%; Women: 83%–93%
- Combined sexual and physical abuse increased alcohol dependence for men
- Combined sexual abuse and boarding school attendance were significant for women
- Women with 4 or more ACEs had a 7x increase in alcohol dependence

Trauma in Indian Country



Indian People Today

- There are 4.5 million Indigenous People in the US
- Indigenous People make up 1.5% of the total US population
- 1.3 million Indian People are under the age of 18
- Less than 336,000 are over 65
- Over 65% live in off-reservation communities



Roots of Violence Against Indian Women and Girls



Historical Trauma and Contemporary Pain

**Understanding the Impact of
Historical Trauma on Tribal
Youth**

Questions

- **With regard to historical trauma, what have you seen in your community?**
- **What has been the impact of historical trauma on your youth?**

Trauma and Teen Pregnancy

Youth exposed to violence more likely to become teen parents; teen parents have high rates of abuse

- Youth who experience physical or sexual abuse more likely to have rapid repeat pregnancy
- Young teen mothers (15 or younger vs. 16-19) more than 2x as likely to have experienced childhood physical or sexual abuse
- Exposure to abuse, neglect and violence increases risk for victimization, mental health problems and delinquency and linked to poorer outcomes

Trauma and Teen Pregnancy

- Teen parents with histories of childhood trauma may use experience of parenthood and feelings of parental protectiveness as source of renewed hope for the future
- **Northern Plains** adolescents being served by an American Indian Teen Mother Program
 - 61% reported IPV; 37.5% during pregnancy
 - 22.5% reported current sexual trauma

Teen Dating Violence

- Ongoing pattern of coercive control in the context of a dating relationship
- May include physical, sexual or psychological abuse, electronic aggression or economic coercion
- May include sexual or reproductive coercion, mental health coercion or substance abuse coercion

Teen Dating Violence

- **Question:** Based on your experience, are there other dimensions you would add to this definition?

Childhood Trauma and DV Increase Adolescents' Risks

- **Trauma** increases the risk for substance abuse
- **Dating violence** increases the risk for reproductive coercion and birth control sabotage and for mental health and substance abuse coercion.
- **Substance abuse coercion** increases the risk for sexual coercion
- **Mental health and substance abuse coercion** increase the risk for behavioral health symptoms, undermine credibility, reduce access to services and resources, and increase the risk for incarceration

Trauma and Adolescents: What You May See

- **Experiencing intrusive and distressing feelings:**
 - Feeling guilty and ashamed about what happened
 - Feeling self-conscious about their intense feelings
 - Being upset at and trying to avoid reminders of what happened
 - Nightmares or insomnia
 - Hypervigilance and fear, hopelessness, anger and irritability
- **Attempts to manage feelings**
 - Wishes or plans to seek revenge
 - Sensation-seeking and/or potentially self-harming behaviors such as substance use, reckless driving, **high risk sexual activities**
- **Difficulty concentrating and learning**
- **Dramatic changes in self-image, relationships, and attitudes**

In a Strength-Based Approach, Resilience Is a Critical Ingredient

Resilience: Capacity for successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances

Question: What are some examples of resilience that you've seen in working with young people?

Summary: Trauma & Adolescents

- Teens experience multiple types of trauma
- Responses to trauma and coping strategies can increase risk
- Adverse childhood experiences increase risk for subsequent health, mental health and substance abuse problems
- Gender-based violence increases the risk of developing health, mental health, and substance abuse conditions
- Stigma, poverty, institutionalization, oppression, and discrimination compound these risks
- All increase the risk for teen pregnancy
- Addressing previous trauma and current DV increases likelihood of success

Trauma and Adolescents

- **How does this fit with what you are seeing?**
- **What else are you seeing in the young people you are working with?**
- **How does trauma affect their response to your program?**

How Does Understanding Trauma & DV Help?

- Normalizes and makes sense of responses
- Acknowledges importance and challenges of connection
- Recognizes the role of coercive control
- Helps us respond in more effective and empathic ways
- Helps us understand our own responses and their impact
- Acknowledges a broader context

The Importance of Culture, DV and Trauma-Informed Approaches

- Without a trauma framework, services can be retraumatizing
- Without a DV framework, services can be endangering
- Without a culture lens, services may not be relevant
- Without a human rights lens, services may not be inclusive
- Understanding and responding appropriately can counter these effects

Creating Trauma-Informed Services

- **Recognize pervasiveness and impact of trauma**
 - On participants, staff, organizations & communities
- **Use collaborative, strength-based approach to counteract experience of abuse**
 - Attend to physical and emotional safety
 - Provide information, tools and resources
 - Support empowerment through skill-building
- **Minimize retraumatization**
 - Empathic engagement: offer respect, connection and hope
 - Provide clarity, consistency, transparency, choice, and control
 - Prepare for trauma triggers
- **Promote safety and healing**
- **Attend to the role of culture, and.....**

Sustain Ourselves in the Work by

- Recognizing the role trauma plays in our own lives
- Providing support and opportunity for reflection and for effective supervision
- Supporting self-care to nourish empathy
- Modeling in our day-to-day interactions the systemic changes we are trying to make

The Environment We Create

Communicates our beliefs about the people who participate in our programs

- The policy and programmatic environment
- The physical and sensory environment
- The interpersonal environment

A Welcoming Environment Says

“You belong here.”

What Would this Look Like in Our Programs and Organizations?

- In what ways do trauma-informed services have relevance for your work?
- What do you already know about trauma and trauma-informed practice?
- What are you already doing that is trauma-informed?

Do You Ever Wonder?

“What do you do when adolescents’ behavior gets in the way of the work, gets in the way of their responding to the information we offer, and in the way of their using the services we provide?”

What If You Wondered...

“What do I do when **trauma’s impact** gets in the way of the work, gets in the way of their responding to the information we give, and in the way they use the services we have?”



**In Becoming Trauma-
Informed, First Change
How We Are, and That
Will Change What We
Do**



Cultural Values and Traditional Practices

Cultural Practices

The language of healing through such cultural practices as

- Welcoming women, offering sweet grass, sage, and something to drink in a warm caring environment
- Promoting cultural awareness, education, sharing, and practices unique to each tribe
- Offering traditional healing, sacred medicines, sweat lodges, drumming, singing, and dancing
- Incorporating traditional values and ceremonies, making relatives

Spiritual Beings

- We are emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual
- We are spiritual beings on a human journey, not human beings on a spiritual journey
- For victims of violence, often a westernized approach does not acknowledge the spiritual wound of our whole being
- Holistic approach is necessary to help victims/survivors heal
 - Both traditional and western approaches can be utilized at the same time

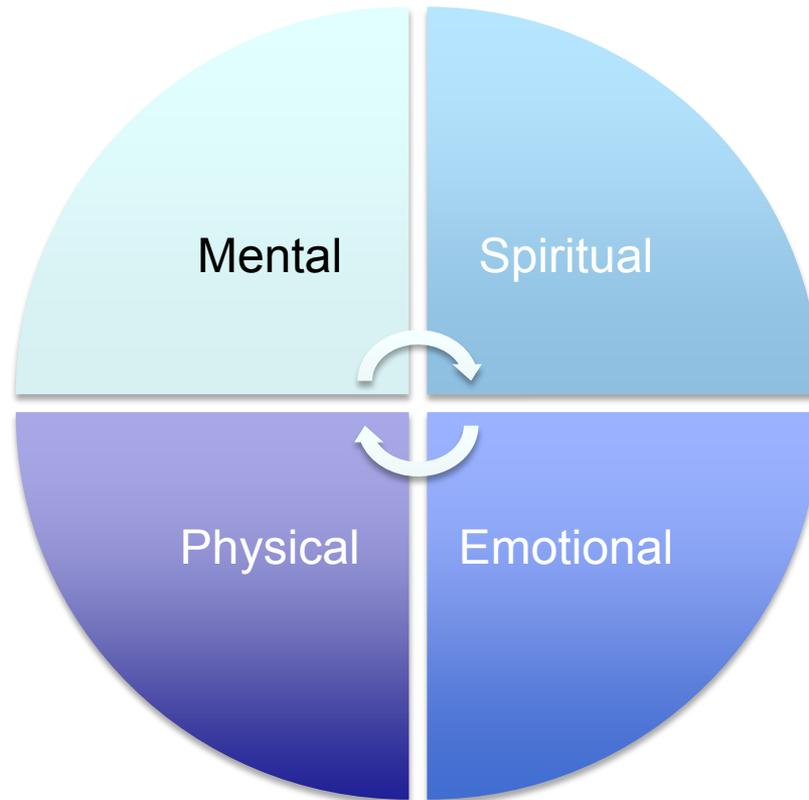
Way of Knowing

1. Native life is centered on the four seasons, four directions, and the natural world
2. Traditional spirituality is not a 'religion' so much as it is an integral seamless part of the very being of our society
3. Native spirituality and beliefs are sacred; to use them in any way other than the way they were intended would be sacrilegious
4. Learning to live in the traditional ways is not easy

Ceremonial and Sacred Ways

- Women's Full Moon Ceremony
- Cedar Bath
- Sweat Lodges
- Fasting
- Wiping of Tears Ceremony
- Healing Women's Camp
- Healing Camp for Men
- Picking Medicines
- Drums and Songs
- Use of Feathers
- Sacred Fires
- Sacred Directions, Seasons, Winds

“IF THE EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, PHYSICAL, AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF A WOMAN IS INTACT, SO TOO IS THAT OF HER FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETY.” INDIGENOUS PROVERB



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*Strengthening Sovereignty, Working to End Violence
Against Indian Women*