

# Using the Nurtured Heart Approach<sup>®</sup> as a Trauma-Informed Practice in Schools

Christine Abrahams, Ed.D., LPC, LMHC, NCC, ACS  
Home Education School Counselor, Lee County  
Fort Myers, Florida

# OBJECTIVES

---

- Explain the signs of trauma
- Explain why conventional methods of managing children of trauma often fail despite the best of intentions
- Shift a challenging child to using his or her intensity in successful ways, even if the child is diagnosed with ADHD, ODD or exhibits other difficult behavior.
- Apply the core methodologies of the Nurtured Heart Approach to build Inner Wealth™ in all children and create a richer and safer school environment.

# WHAT IS TRAUMA?

---

- Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.
- Some examples:
  - Experiencing violence, physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect
  - Witnessing violence in the home or community
  - Having a family member attempt or die by suicide

# HOW DOES TRAUMA MANIFEST IN CHILDREN?

---

- ADHD symptoms
- Need for control and safety
- Disruptive and confrontational behavior
- Power struggles with teachers
- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Lack of self-esteem
- Desire for deep connection but fearful of it

# HOW ARE THESE BEHAVIORS INTERPRETED BY EDUCATORS?

---

- Student :
  - Is choosing to “act out” to get out of class
  - Has ODD or ADHD
  - Wants negative attention
  - Is being manipulative
  - Is being disrespectful on purpose
  - Doesn't want to learn

# HOW EDUCATORS RESPOND?

---

- Punishment
  - Removal from class
  - Detention
  - Suspension
- Evaluate student for special education

# REFRAMING NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

---

- Instead of lazy, lacking skills
- Instead of choosing to act out, trying to connect
- Instead of ODD/ADHD, student's trauma was triggered

# HOW SHOULD EDUCATORS RESPOND IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED WAY?

---

- Create opportunities for connection
- Make the classroom a safe space
- Build confidence in the child
- Approach the student from a place of curiosity about the behavior



# NEUROPATHWAYS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

---

NHA takes advantage of the optimal learning brain state by tapping into neuropathways that are related to success and feeling good.

- Compliment/energize triggers serotonin – feel good transmitter
- Similar to video game – pleasure/reward pathways
- Recognition does the same thing – serenity, peace, happiness, open to learning.
- Helpful in creating connection and a safe space for children

# WHAT IS THE NHA?

---

- The 3 Stands™
  1. Absolutely No!
  2. Absolutely Yes!
  3. Absolutely Clear!

# CHOOSING MORE ENERGY

---

- Students of trauma want deep connection but are afraid of it.
- “Acting out” or “Pressing our buttons” could be the only way they know how to connect
- Adults respond by becoming emotionally activated
- Students expect anger which reinforces their poor sense of self

**STAND 1**  
**I REFUSE TO ENERGIZE NEGATIVITY. I WILL NOT  
REWARD NEGATIVITY WITH MY ENERGY,  
CONNECTION, OR RELATIONSHIP.**

---

- Changes can't begin without the child perceiving that the old pattern of response–connection, energy and relationship for negativity – is no longer available
- Adults need to be intentional about watching where their energy is flowing
- Stand 1 must be applied to the adult's self-talk as well

**STAND 2**  
**I RELENTLESSLY CREATE AND ENERGIZE POSITIVITY AND SUCCESS. I ENERGIZE AND NURTURE FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESS**

---

- Children need to be recognized for what they are doing right
- Stronger, more specific positives need to be used to articulate what they are doing right in the moment
  - Positives need to navigate around defenses
  - Positives need to be felt and digested
  - Positives help build a child's inner wealth

# CHOOSING WHAT NOT TO ENERGIZE

---



# VIDEO GAME THEORY

---

- Kids who cannot focus on homework can play a video game with mastery and accomplishment
- In the video game, life truly makes sense & follows logic that is very different than at home and school
- Video games compel kids to successfulness

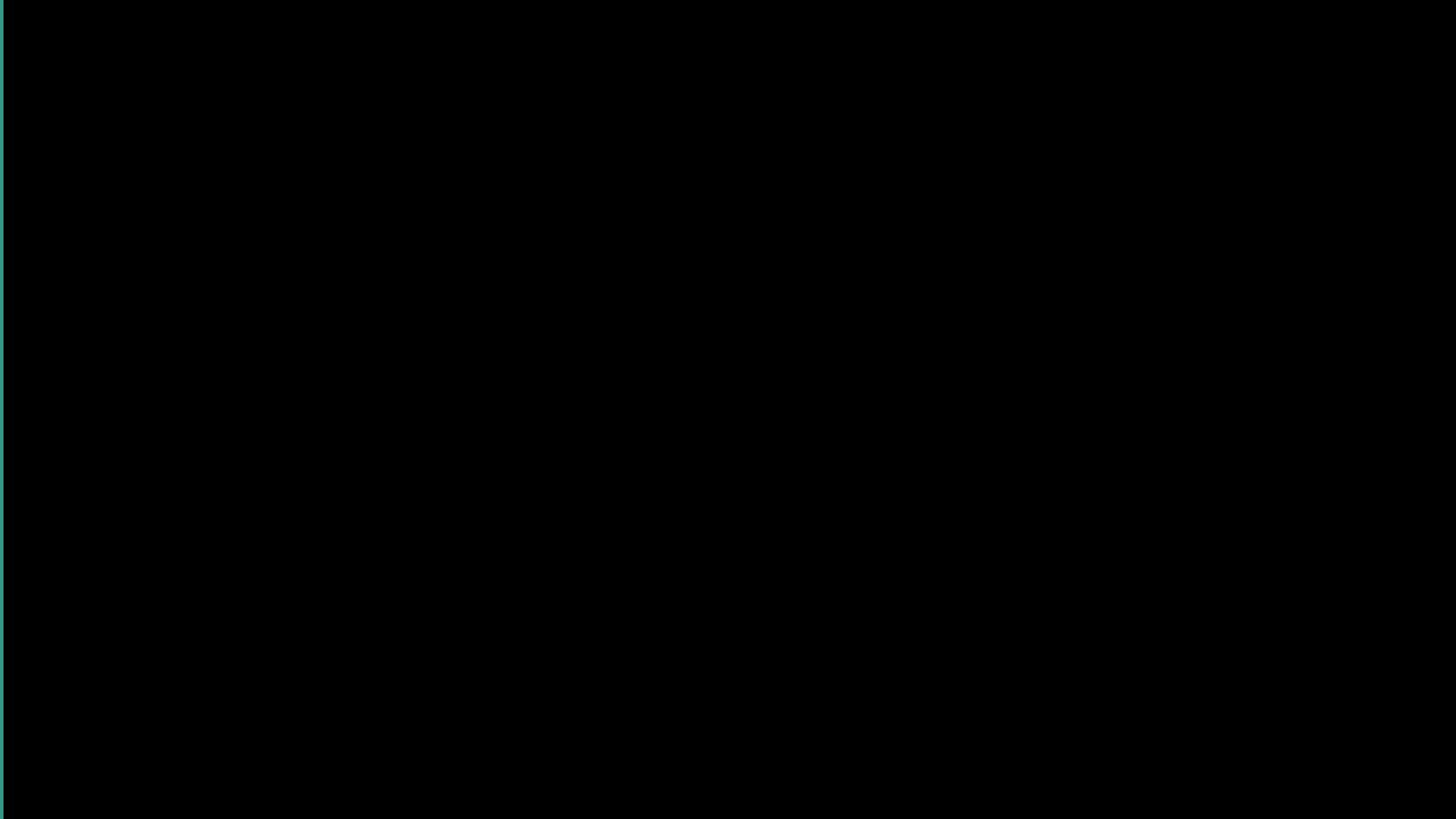
# VIDEO GAMES – CLEAR AND PREDICTABLE

---

- Incentives are strong and predictable.
- Confronts a child with their success – score, bells and whistles.
- Rules are clear and predictable.
- Delivers a consequence – always.
- In a moment, the child is back in the game and is inspired not to break the rules again.



# ENERGIZING SUCCESS



# NHA RECOGNITIONS

---

- What do you see?
- What is happening?
- What is not happening?
- What does it say about who they are as a person growing into their greatness?

**STAND 3: ABSOLUTELY CLEAR  
I SET AND ENFORCE CLEAR LIMITS AND CLEAR  
CONSEQUENCES IN AN UN-ENERGIZED WAY. I WILL  
ALWAYS PROVIDE A TRUE CONSEQUENCE.**

---

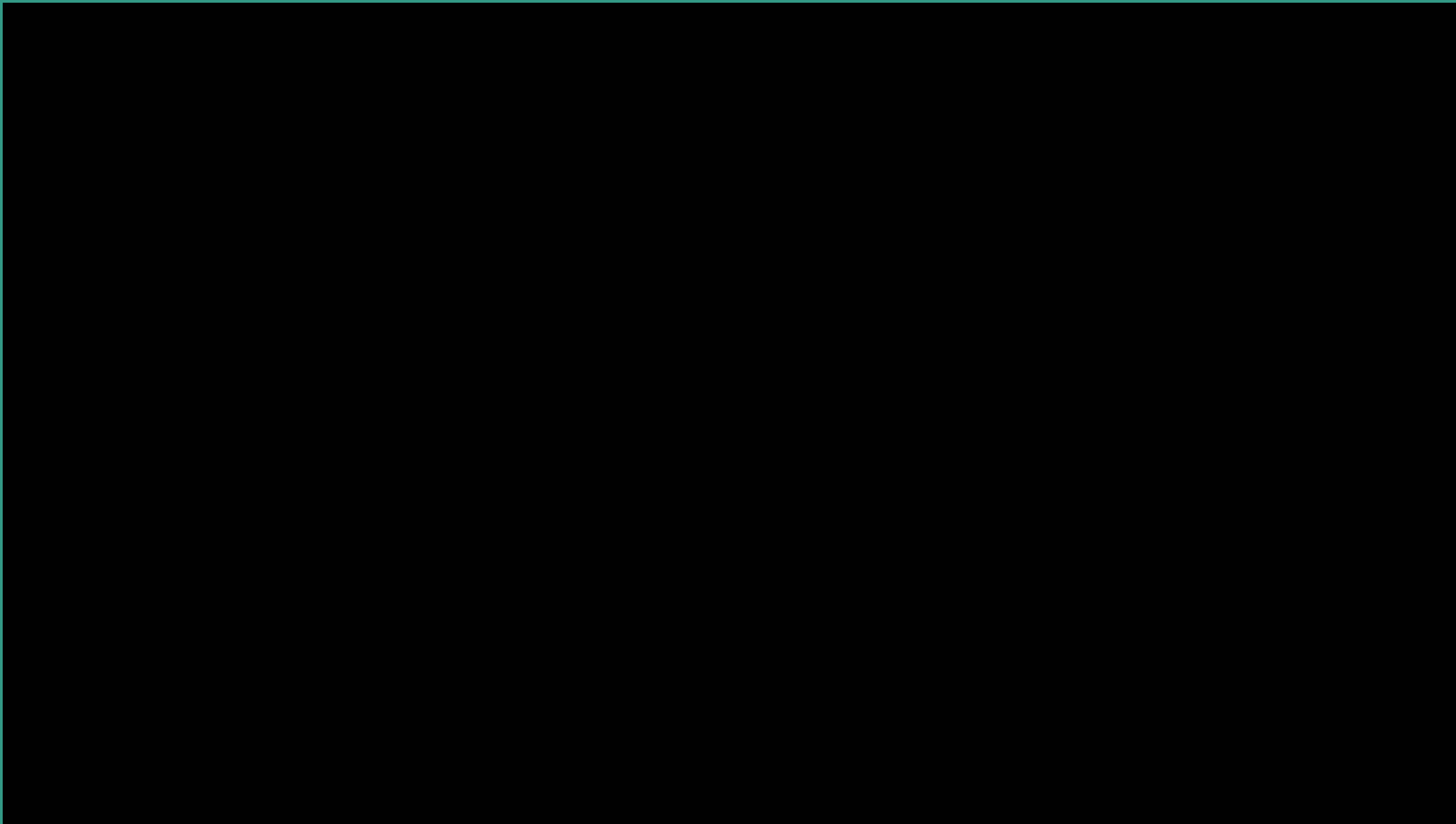
- The video game delivers clarity, always plays hard ball with the rules and always delivers the consequence each and every time – consistency and reliability.
- Here are the rules and here's what happens when you choose to break a rule

# PERFECTION IS NOT REQUIRED

---

- Broken rules simply result in consequences that now lead to getting back on track.
- Always doable
- No big deal

# GETTING BACK IN THE GAME



# YOU AND RESETS

---

- Think of a moment when you were really escalated...
- What helps you to reset yourself?
- What doesn't help you reset?
- You can model your reset strategies for students

# RESETS: THE KEY TO CONSEQUENCES

---

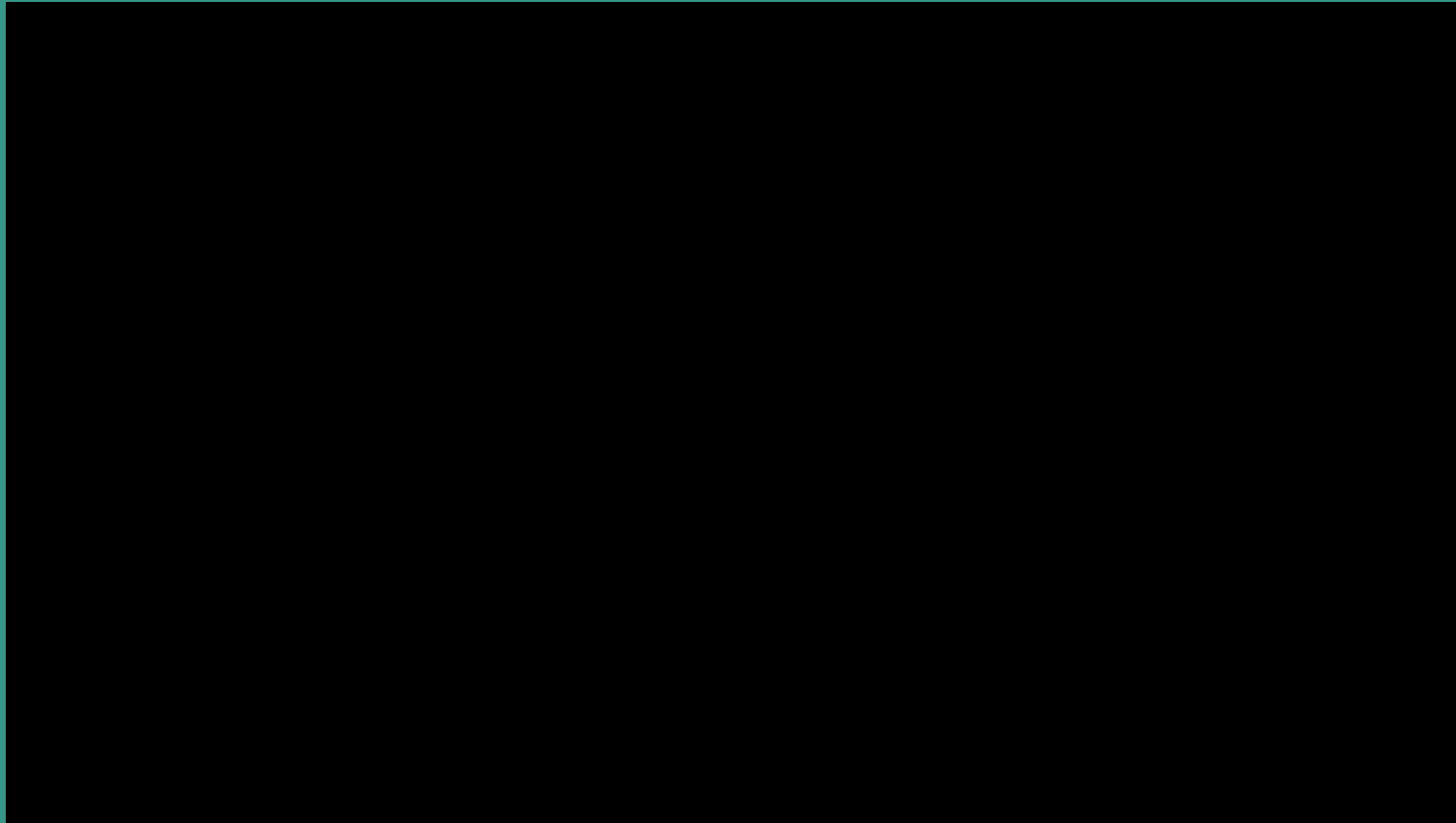
- Adult uses a key word like “Reset” or “Pause.’
- Adult unplugs his energy from the child and turns away.
- In moments, the adult turns back and acknowledges child for achieving their consequence.
- Adult now focuses on success-acknowledges rules not broken. (“Now, you are not swearing at me...”)

# THE DANCE OF THE RESET





# AN EXAMPLE OF HOW NHA BUILDS INNER WEALTH IN CHILDREN OF TRAUMA



# HOW CAN COUNSELORS USE THE NURTURED HEART APPROACH?

---

- When meeting with students, look for and point out their greatness.
- Continually use the approach with your students who have experienced trauma.
- In groups with students of trauma, end every session with an energizing circle
- In groups with students of trauma, teach them the 3 Stands and have them practice.

# QUESTIONS?

---

