Children's Home Society of North Carolina

Safety First

This issue of the ARC Explorer, "Safety First" offers a reminder about how our human brains respond to danger and trauma. This information can be helpful when parenting children who have been exposed to trauma.

Under normal circumstances, our behavior and actions are in the control of our higher brain structures – the parts of our brain that weigh options, reason, filter and process incoming information. **When we encounter danger, however, a rapid mobilization occurs in the body.** The brain signals the release of neurotransmitters that increase our heart rate and blood pressure, our sensory systems go on high alert, and our bodies are primed for action. At the same time, other parts of the brain, which might otherwise be used for thinking, considering consequences, and reasoning go "offline." This enables all the body's resources to focus on the threat at hand. If you glance up and see a large boulder falling off a cliff and headed straight for you, would you rather think and reason? Or ***run***?

Behaviors that result from the human danger response have been described as fight, flight, freeze, and submit. They serve to reduce anxiety or fear in the face of perceived threat. **Have you seen any of the behaviors below from the child or teen in your life?**

It's important to recognize these for what they are – "safety first" behaviors resulting from the body's danger response system.

Source: Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents, Second Edition, How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency. Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh (2019).

Thanks for reading February's ARC Explorer! Next month's topic: "How can we help increase the sense of felt safety for the youth in our care?" **For additional ideas and activities, ask your Specialist about the *ARC-Ways Toolkit!***

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