

# Clarifying the Role of **Trauma-informed Care** within Applied Behavior Analysis

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**NATIONAL  
ACADEMIES** *Sciences  
Engineering  
Medicine*



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VANDERBILT  
KENNEDY CENTER  
for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

A young boy with dark hair is looking down at papers on a desk. In the background, there is a blue folder with the word 'KUMON' written on it. The text is overlaid on the image.

# Clarifying the Role of **Trauma-informed Care** within Applied Behavior Analysis

# **Take Home Point**

**A trauma-informed  
approach to ABA is  
possible, desirable, and  
scalable**



# Trauma-informed Care





# Trauma-informed Care

A universal approach—taken by practitioners and organizations—to appropriately support and avoid re-traumatizing clients who *may have experienced trauma*

*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014)*



**Trauma-informed Care**

**≠**

**Trauma-specific Services**

# **Trauma-informed Care Pillars**

**Acknowledge the Potential for Trauma**

**Promote Choice and Collaboration**

**Ensure Safety and Trust**

**Emphasize Skill Building**



Acknowledge

Trauma







**Unstable relationships**

**Discriminatory acts**

**Racial violence**

**Natural disaster**

**Bullying**

**Abuse**

**Neglect**

**Gaslighting**

**Betrayal**

**Suicide**

**Potentially  
Traumatic Event**

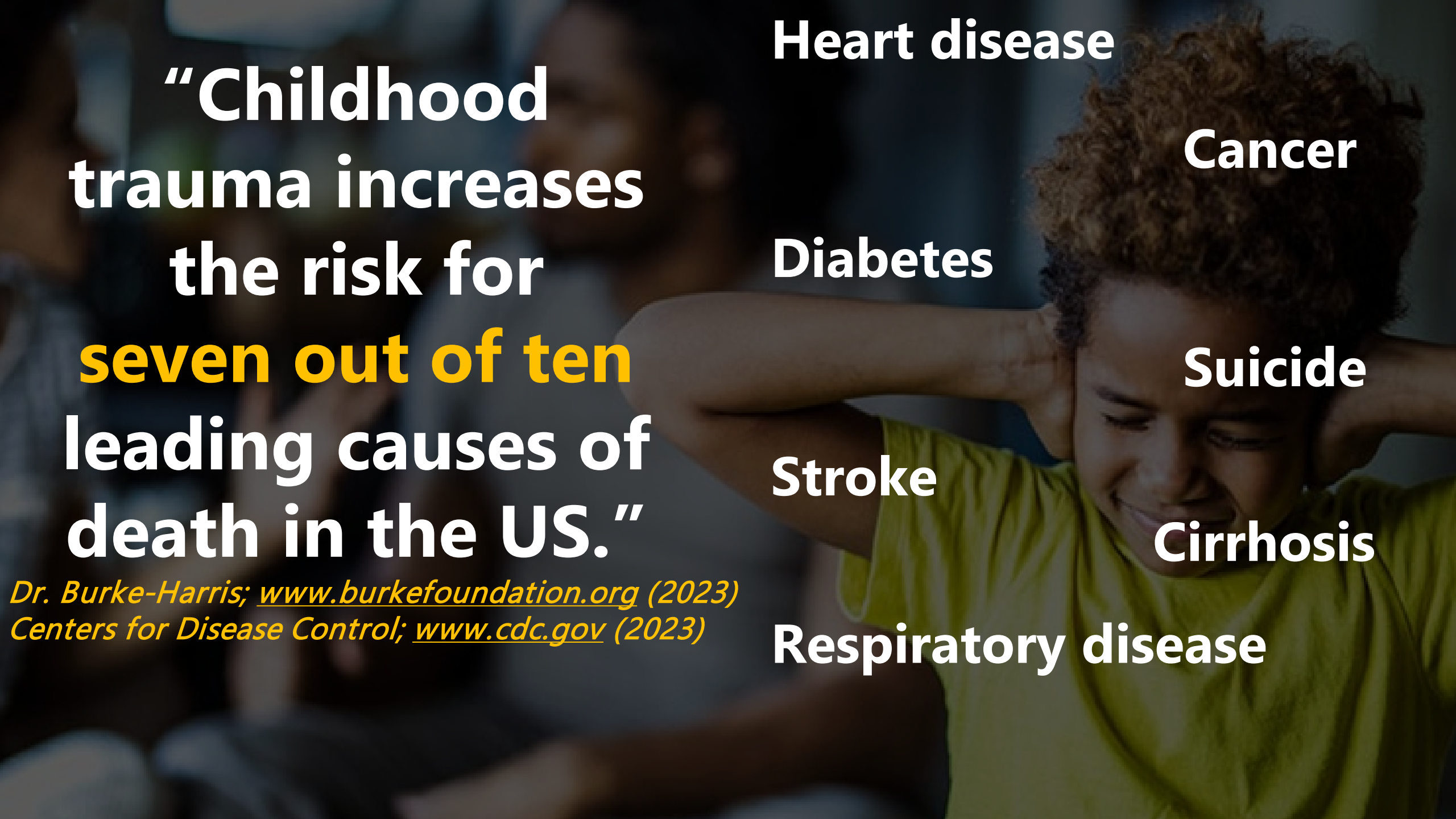
**Food insecurity**

**Economic hardship**

**Witnessing violence**

**Domestic violence**

**Sexual violence**

A young person with curly hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a light green t-shirt. They have their hands behind their ears and a pained or distressed expression on their face. The background is blurred, showing other people in a crowd.

**“Childhood  
trauma increases  
the risk for  
seven out of ten  
leading causes of  
death in the US.”**

*Dr. Burke-Harris; [www.burkefoundation.org](http://www.burkefoundation.org) (2023)  
Centers for Disease Control; [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) (2023)*

**Heart disease**

**Cancer**

**Diabetes**

**Suicide**

**Stroke**

**Cirrhosis**

**Respiratory disease**



A young child with curly hair is shown in the foreground, covering their ears with both hands. They are wearing a light green t-shirt. In the background, a blurred crowd of people is visible, suggesting a public event or gathering. The overall tone is somber, with a dark overlay on the image.

**Relative to “the norm,” individuals who...**

are autistic or with an IDD

are black, indigenous, or other people of color (BIPOC)

have lower than average SES

identify as LGBTQ+

are from military and vet families

have experienced homelessness

enter foster care

**...are at greater risk for encountering PTEs**

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**...are at greater risk for encountering PTEs**





**Hyperarousal**

**Increased negative thinking and feeling**

**Lower self-perception**

**Nightmares**

**Learned helplessness**

## **Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms**

**Self-destructive behavior**

**Irritable, aggressive behavior**

**Avoiding similar events**

**Unwillingness to try new things**

# Understanding Severe Behavior



*Hanley et al., 2003; JABA;  
Layman et al., 2023; RJADD  
Melanson & Fahmie, 2023, JABA*







Acknowledge

Trauma



Promote  
Choice

# Promote Choice and Collaboration

1. Identify goals and procedures together
2. Include learner in intervention planning

*Howell et al. (2019); Kern et al. (1998); Rajaraman et al. (2023); Shogren et al. (2004)*

# Promote Choice and Collaboration

1. Identify goals and procedures together
2. Include learner in intervention planning
3. Incorporate choice-making opportunities

*Howell et al. (2019); Kern et al. (1998); Rajaraman et al. (2023); Shogren et al. (2004)*



Ensure Safety  
and Trust

# Ensure Safety and Trust

1. Identify stressors/triggers and be thoughtful about their presentation

*Gover et al. (2023); Rajaraman et al. (2022); Shillingsburg et al. (2014, 2019); Staubitz et al. (2022)*

# Ensure Safety and Trust

1. Identify stressors/triggers and be thoughtful about their presentation
2. Be kind and empathetic

*Gover et al. (2023); Rajaraman et al. (2022); Shillingsburg et al. (2014, 2019); Staubitz et al. (2022)*



A group of children are walking away from the camera, carrying large backpacks. The children are wearing various clothing, including hats and shorts. The backpacks are in different colors and patterns, such as yellow, red, and blue. The background is slightly blurred, showing more children and what appears to be an outdoor setting.


# Ensure Safety and Trust

1. Identify stressors/triggers and be thoughtful about their presentation
2. Be kind and empathetic
3. Allow learners to give and withdraw assent


*Gover et al. (2023); Rajaraman et al. (2022); Shillingsburg et al. (2014, 2019); Staubitz et al. (2022)*

Emphasize  
Skill building

## Toward trauma-informed applications of behavior analysis

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Holly C. Gover

The Ivymount School

Anthony P. Cammilleri

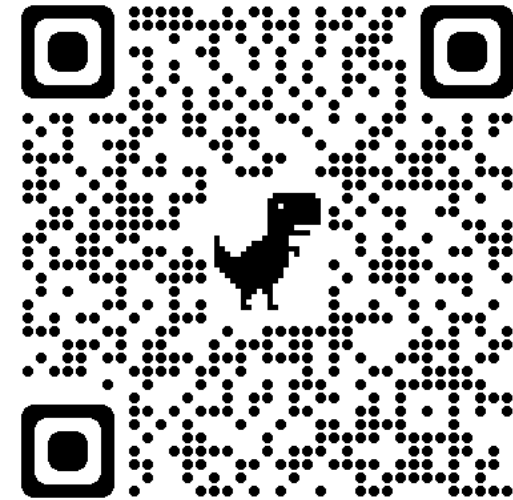
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Emphasize Skill Building



# Promote Choice and Collaboration

Behavior Analysis in Practice  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-020-00548-2>



## RESEARCH ARTICLE



### Minimizing Escalation by Treating Dangerous Problem Behavior Within an Enhanced Choice Model

Adithyan Rajaraman<sup>1</sup> • Gregory P. Hanley<sup>2</sup> • Holly C. Gover<sup>2,3</sup> • Johanna L. Staubitz<sup>4</sup> • John E. Staubitz<sup>5</sup> • Kathleen M. Simcoe<sup>5</sup> • Rachel Metras<sup>2</sup>

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NUMBER 4 (FALL)

Effects of an enhanced choice model of skill-based treatment for students with emotional/behavioral disorders

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Michelle Hopton

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-023-06085-5>

## ORIGINAL PAPER



### Distance-Based Collaborations for Assessing and Treating Challenging Behavior

Rachel L. Metras<sup>1,4</sup> • Gregory P. Hanley<sup>2,3</sup> • Matthew J. Carbone<sup>2,3</sup>

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