

A Developmental Model of Trauma, Growth, and Resilience: The Place for Language and Reading

STEVEN P. DYKSTRA, PH.D.



In the passage from the cradle to the grave,
We are born madly dancing

- Dan Fogelberg

A Girl From Up North



The Fundamentals of Development

Safety and Security

Language

Relationships



A Review of Classic Developmental Stages



Psychosocial Trauma

Injury

ACES

Risk Permanent Changes – PTSD

Range of Trauma

Severe and Acute vs Chronic and less severe

Illiteracy as Trauma Shame Fatigue



RAD –Before PTSD

Rutter

Harlow

An insult to the essence of our humanity

Neurological Consequences

Trauma

- Smaller Brains
 - Smaller Corpus Callosum
 - Inefficient organization
 - Overuse of Right Hemisphere
 - Underuse of Frontal Lobes
 - Reflects a deeply evolved need
- 

The Neurological Basis

Language

- Helps Organize the Brain
 - Promotes a Left Hemisphere bias
 - Enlarges the Corpus Callosum
 - Promotes and builds frontal lobe activity
 - Generates efficiency
 - Reflects a deeply evolved need
- 

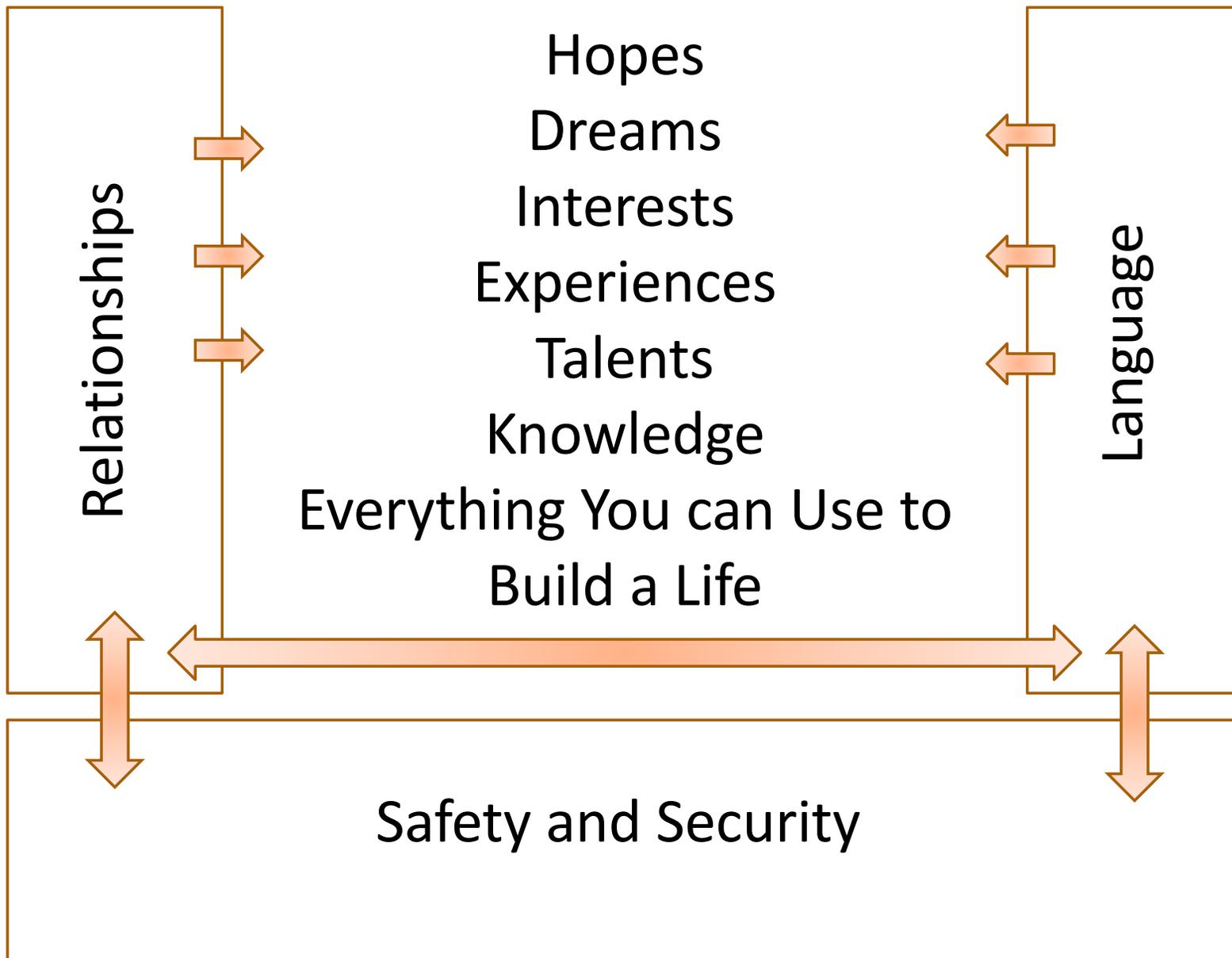
The Neurological Basis

Relationships

- Increases brain connectivity
- Promotes Language
- Soothes the brain
- Our complex social drive is likely the cause of our huge brains
- The “default network”
- Closely linked to safety and survival
- Reflects a deeply evolved need

“Evolution has made a bet that the best thing for our brain to do in any spare moment is to get ready for what comes next in social terms.”

-Matthew Lieberman



Reading is a technology which expands the evolved basis of language beyond the immediate environment and lets it reach other times, places, and people. It allows us to be in relationship with people we have never met, to consider the motivations of characters who never existed except on paper, to learn about places and things we have never seen, and to exercise the deepest mental skills at our own pace, in our own time, according to our own needs.



When you Grow Up

How that works when you're 5

How that works when you're 15



Poverty and Racism

Poverty is Trauma

Racism is violence

“I guess we were poor, but everybody was poor, and we didn’t know it”

If you’re poor, everybody knows it

Epigenetics and generational trauma

Makes it harder to believe in your future at 15

Closing the Gap and the Lessons of Head Start



Where Can We Intervene?

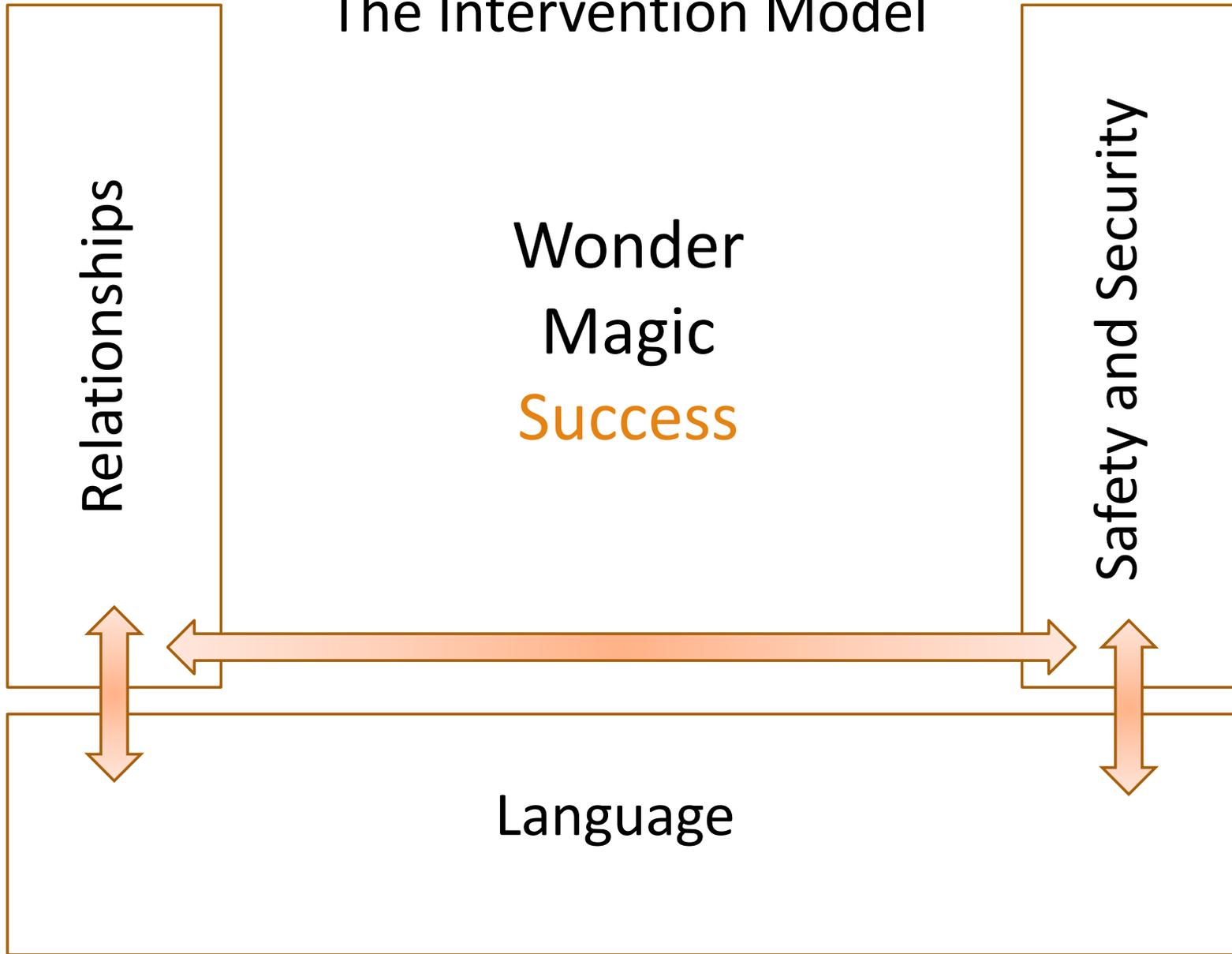
Most kids begin with adequate safety and security, though some are damaged by trauma, later. **Reduce trauma and build resilience.**

Relationships are difficult to promote directly. **Quality is more important than quantity.**

Language can be directly influenced, with indirect benefits to relationships and resilience. **We have a vast infrastructure already in place!**

Offer wonder, magic, **and success.**

The Intervention Model



“The most important thing you can do for a young child who has experienced trauma, the best thing to do for them, is teach them to read.”

-Donald Meichenbaum

If you are (*blank*) and can't
read!



The Great Vaccine

Reading, and learning to read well...

- Builds and extends language
- Develops and repairs the brain
- Builds the “default network”
- Fosters resilience
- Benefits everyone, harms no one
- Improves the odds for every good thing by both building the “bucket” and helping to fill it.

Literacy as Justice

Unlike poverty, we know what to do about literacy

Unlike racism, we know what to do about literacy

It isn't easy, but we know what to do

We have the knowledge

We have the money

We lack the resolve

Saving a Life

The Power of Teachers



Steve Dykstra

stevedykstra@sbcglobal.net

414-399-7201

