

# COLLECTIVE TRAUMA, COLLECTIVE GROWTH: BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH EDUCATION

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Created by Rebecca Stone, LCSW  
and Benjamin Kagedan, PsyD

Presented by Rebecca Stone, LCSW

# TRAUMA

“Aloneness in the face of emotionally overwhelming experience”

*Diana Fosha*



# ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF TRAUMA

- Vicarious Traumatization
- Intergenerational trauma



# VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Symptoms caused by  
exposure to traumatic stories

Symptoms mirror PTSD  
symptoms



*(Bride & Kleber, 1995)*

# INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Definition: Transmission of traumatic stress from one generation to the next through biological and psychological influences.

(e.g. Children of holocaust survivors)

*(Wollyn, M. and Cozolino, L.)*

# TRAUMA IN THE CLASSROOM

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Many Jewish students will come to class with one or both of these types of secondary trauma (descendants of survivors, surrounded by news of increased anti-semitism in U.S.A, school shootings, climate change predictions)

Trauma can be sneaky! We may not even realize when we are in traumatic arousal, as its symptoms can easily often be attributed to other things: withdrawal, irritability, acting out, anxiety, sleepiness/zoning out, poor concentration and learning, nightmares.

# TRAUMA IMPACTS OUR BELIEFS ABOUT SELF AND WORLD

## Examples:

- The world is a cruel/dangerous place  
No one can be trusted
- I am unworthy of love
- It's my fault when bad things happen
- I don't deserve to be alive  
(survivor's guilt) There is no purpose or order in human life



# POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

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**Definition:** The positive change and adaptation individuals can experience after struggling with great adversity.

## Research

Sixty percent of prisoners of war (POWs) examined by Sledge et al. (1980) reported that they approached their lives wiser, more content, stronger, and more self-confident since their captivity.





# POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

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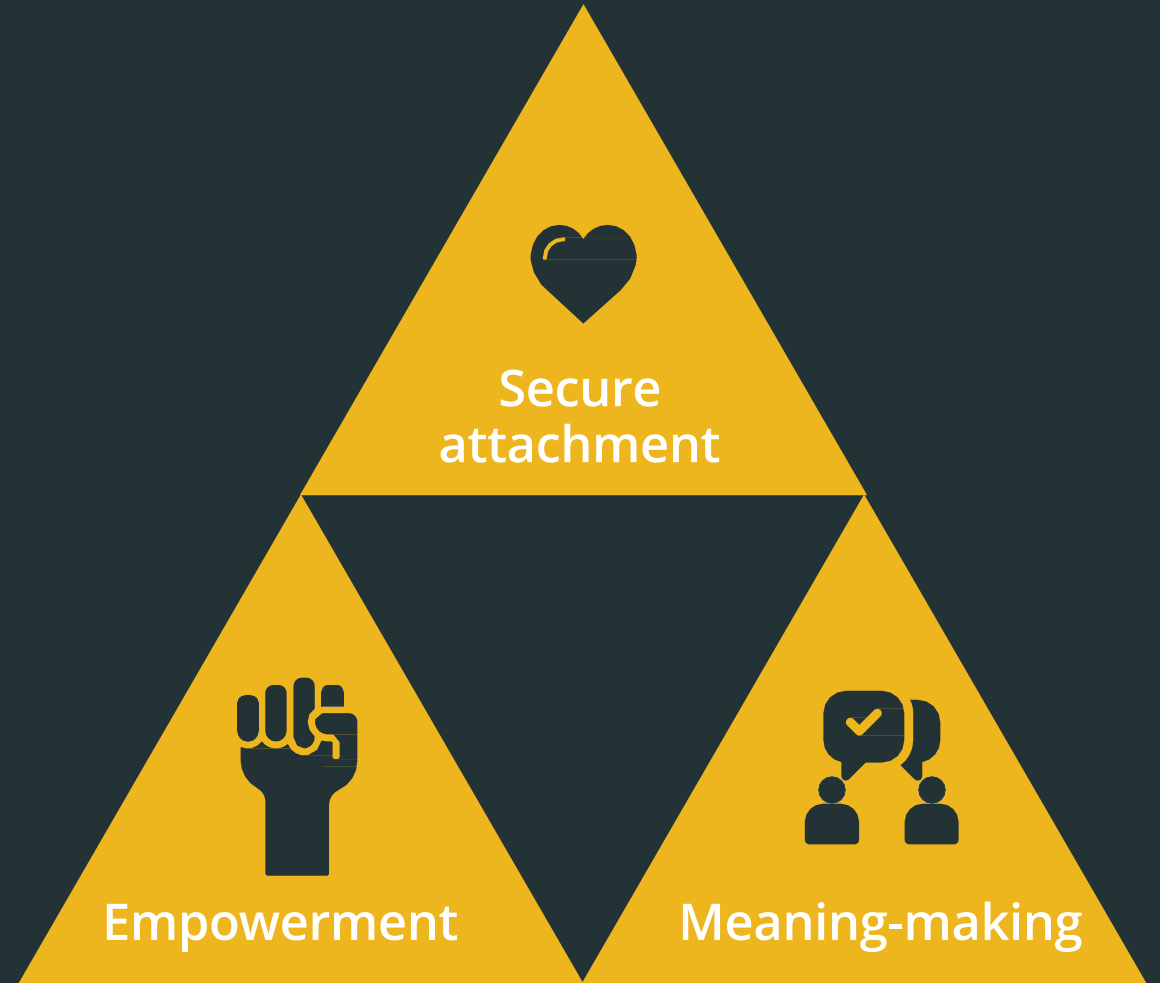
## Domains of Post-Traumatic Growth

- Perception of self (survivor vs. victim)
- Self-reliance (if I can survive this, I can survive anything)
- Awareness of mortality (in a productive way, more conscientious about choices and relationships, greater appreciation of life)
- Openness and expressiveness in relationships
- Increased compassion and generosity
- Spiritual development



*(Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998)*

# HOW DO YOU PROMOTE PTG? (post traumatic growth)



# SECURE ATTACHMENT

**Definition:** A child/adult's internalized expectation of reliability, safety and responsiveness in their caregivers/partners

A learning environment shaped by secure attachment principles is:

- Physically safe
- Consistent
- A safe place to express vulnerability
- Inclusive of difference and individual expression
- Open (not reactive) to negative emotions

# MEANING MAKING

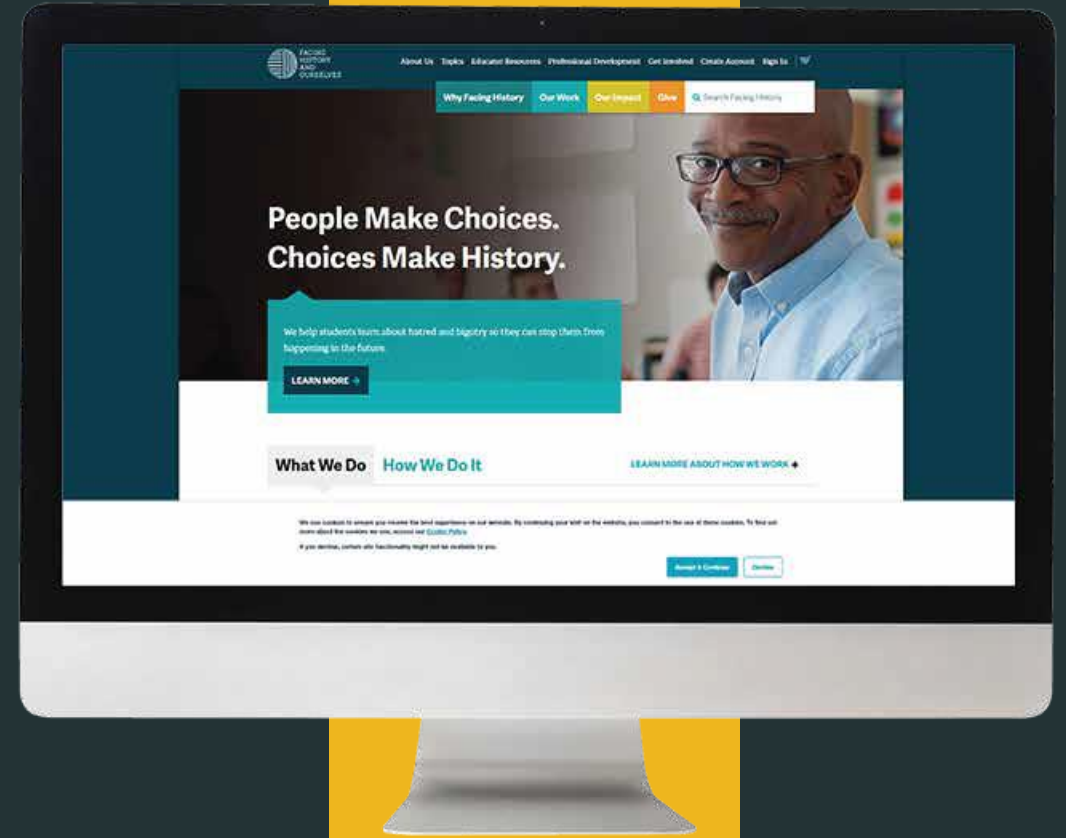
- Telling the story together
- Allowing for, rather than avoiding, the emotions
- Looking at what assumptions/beliefs can form around trauma (e.g. "As a Jew I am always in danger")
- Bringing context and insight to alter overgeneralized beliefs

# EMPOWERMENT

Trauma is defined by a sense of powerlessness, which can lead to ongoing feelings of unsafety and victimhood. Empowerment means restoring a sense of agency and self-determination.

Empowering students means:

- Resourcing (cultivating internal safety)
- Involving them in decision making
- Focus on their power to change the world, protect others in need, fight for justice



# EMPOWERMENT

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Sitting with a new white supremacist client, espousing his hatred for Jews and other minorities. Dr. Eva Eger exemplifies post-traumatic growth...

"The boy continued to rant about the blights to America's purity. My whole being trembled with unease and I struggled with the inclination to wag my finger, shake my fist, make him accountable for his hate – without being accountable for my own. This boy didn't kill my parents. Withholding my love wouldn't conquer his prejudice. I prayed for the ability to meet him with love...I thought of a statistic I read, that most of the members of white supremacist groups in America lost one of their parents before they were ten years old.

...When he left my office that day, he didn't know a thing about my history, but he had seen an alternative to hate and prejudice. He was no longer talking about killing, he had shown me his soft smile. And I had taken responsibility that I not perpetuate hostility and blame, that I not bow to hate and say, *You are too much for me.*"

*(Eger, E.E., The Choice, pp.226-227)*

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