

Brain Science, Trauma, & Supporting Change:

*Working with Young Adults at the
Center of Urban Violence*

The Roca **IMPACT INSTITUTE**
THINK DIFFERENT. DO DIFFERENT.



INTRODUCTIONS



ROCA'S MISSION

Roca's mission is to be a relentless force in disrupting incarceration, poverty, and racism by engaging the young adults, police, and systems at the center of urban violence in relationships to address trauma, find hope, and drive change.

We work with 16-to-24-year-olds who have experienced extensive trauma and are the primary victims or drivers of urban violence.

They are often:

- Involved in the criminal justice system
- Have low literacy and typically no HS degree/GED
- Have no formal or sustained employment history
- Involved with guns, gangs, and drugs
- Have failed out or dropped out of programs, schools, and jobs
- May be young parents

ROCA 101

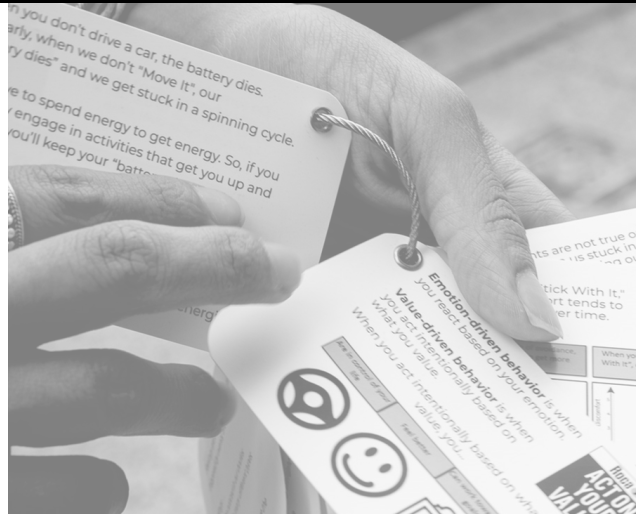


WHAT WE DO



1 CREATE SAFETY AND STABILITY

We do **relentless outreach** and build **transformational relationships** with young people to develop the foundation for change. We meet basic needs, make meaningful connections, and provide moments feeling free from harm.



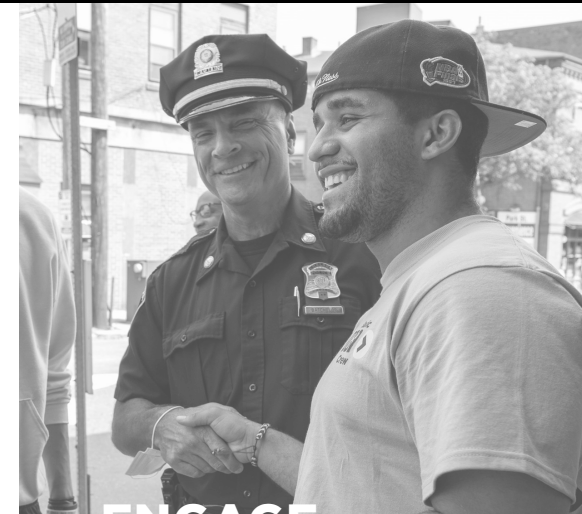
2 TEACH LIFE SAVING SKILLS

We teach a relatable and simple version of **CBT** in the streets – and anywhere a young person is.



3 PRACTICE SKILLS, RELAPSE, & REPEAT

We create tailored programs that serve as spaces for young people to change, not when they are “ready,” but as they still struggle.



4 ENGAGE INSTITUTIONS & SYSTEMS

We relentlessly reach out to system partners, build relationships, and jointly practice new skills that produce better outcomes.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO



The Roca Impact Institute equips institutions and individuals working at the center of urban violence with tools and strategies to address trauma, reduce violence, and improve outcomes for young people.

We do this through:

- Training in trauma informed interventions to build knowledge, skills, and practice
- Facilitation, design, and implementation of focused, coordinated approaches to support agency and systems change.
- Intensive coaching to build staff capacity and sustain change in agencies and systems

KEY CONCEPTS



- In order to prevent or reduce violence, we must understand the **brain science**.
- Trauma is **fear that won't turn off**.
- **Change is possible**, but it takes time and practice.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)** based approaches help us identify and disrupt unhelpful patterns and support behavior change.

UNDERSTANDING THE BRAIN



Pre-Frontal Cortex-

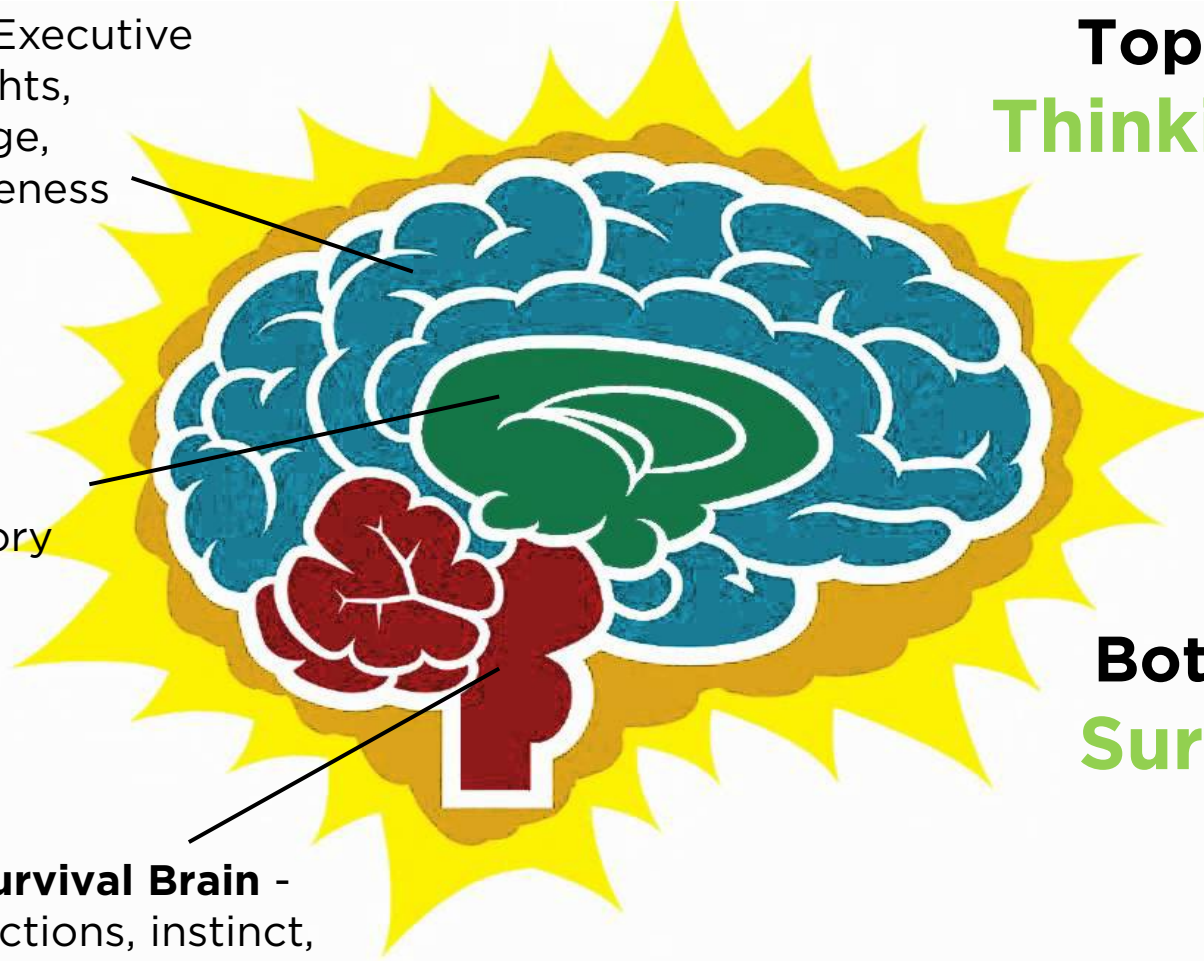
Thinking Brain- Executive Functions, thoughts, planning, language, logic & will, awareness

Limbic System- Emotion Brain-

emotions and motivation, sensory intake, feelings, motivation

Brain Stem-Survival Brain -

basic vital functions, instinct, breathing, swallowing, heartbeat, startle response, motor skills



**Top Brain =
Thinking Brain**

**Bottom Brain =
Survival Brain**

SURVIVAL BRAIN



When we sense a threat or fear, our bodies are triggered into a full body fear response.

We get kicked into our **Bottom, Survival Brain** - and our Top Brain is essentially off-line.

We get kicked into our Survival Brain when we:

- Feel disrespected
- Do not feel in control in a situation
- Are not being listened to
- Perceive gestures or looks as threatening
- Are afraid
- Experience trauma



- ✓ Adrenaline Released
- ✓ Increased Blood Pressure
- ✓ Increased Heart rate
- ✓ Tense Muscles
- ✓ Shallow Breathing
- ✓ Hearing Loss
- ✓ Slowed Digestion
- ✓ Tunnel Vision
- ✓ Dry Mouth

SURVIVAL BRAIN



What does it feel like in your body when you get triggered?

What does it look like when your young people are in survival brain?



- ✓ Adrenaline Released
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UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA



“Trauma is fear that won’t turn off.”



“ Consider the psychological burden of living in fear every day—feeling like you are in a state of ‘fight, flight and/or freeze’ and/or ‘seeking safety’ every waking moment of the day. ”

- Dr. Alisha Moreland-Capuia

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA



- Trauma **changes** the way the brain physically develops and functions
- Traumatic responses can easily be **triggered** by a look, sound, smell, thought or touch and drive reactive behaviors.
- Unaddressed trauma keeps us **stuck** in survival mode.

When we understand the brain science and the impact of trauma, we can actually find meaningful and effective ways to show up, support change, and reduce violence.

TRAUMA AND BEHAVIOR

“TRAUMA DECONTEXTUALIZED IN A PERSON LOOKS LIKE PERSONALITY.
TRAUMA DECONTEXTUALIZED IN A FAMILY LOOKS LIKE FAMILY TRAITS.
TRAUMA DECONTEXTUALIZED IN A PEOPLE LOOKS LIKE CULTURE.”

- Resmaa Menakem

What Traumatic Behavior Responses Look Like....

- Ongoing traumatic experience stored in the body keeping it in a constant state of tension ready to explode if triggered by a look, sound, smell, thought, or touch
- Hypersensitivity to threats and danger
- Challenges with relationships and trust
- Harder time identifying and managing emotions
- Difficulty with attention
- Feel an urgent need to control an environment
- Negative self-image
- Increased risk taking

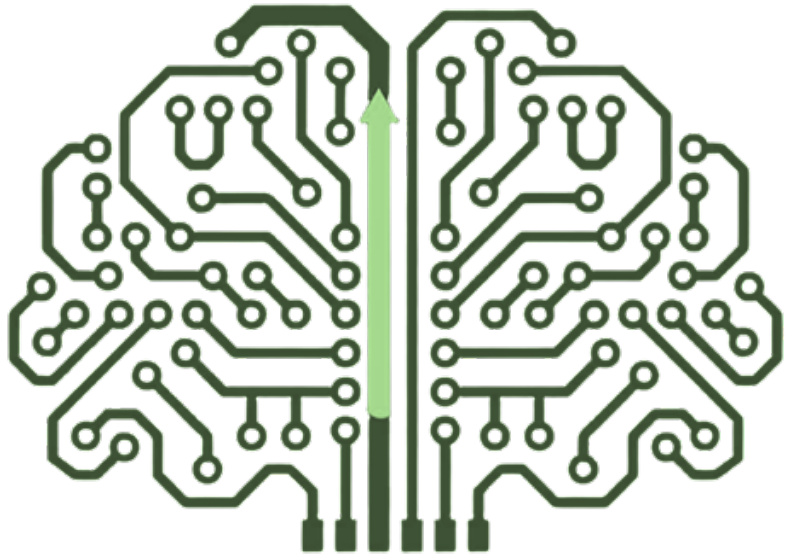
We are not our behaviors.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE WORK



- Change takes **multiple efforts** over time
- It's not about who we are – it's about **what they need**
- We need good **tools and strategies** to support them long-term
- It takes time – but **change is possible**

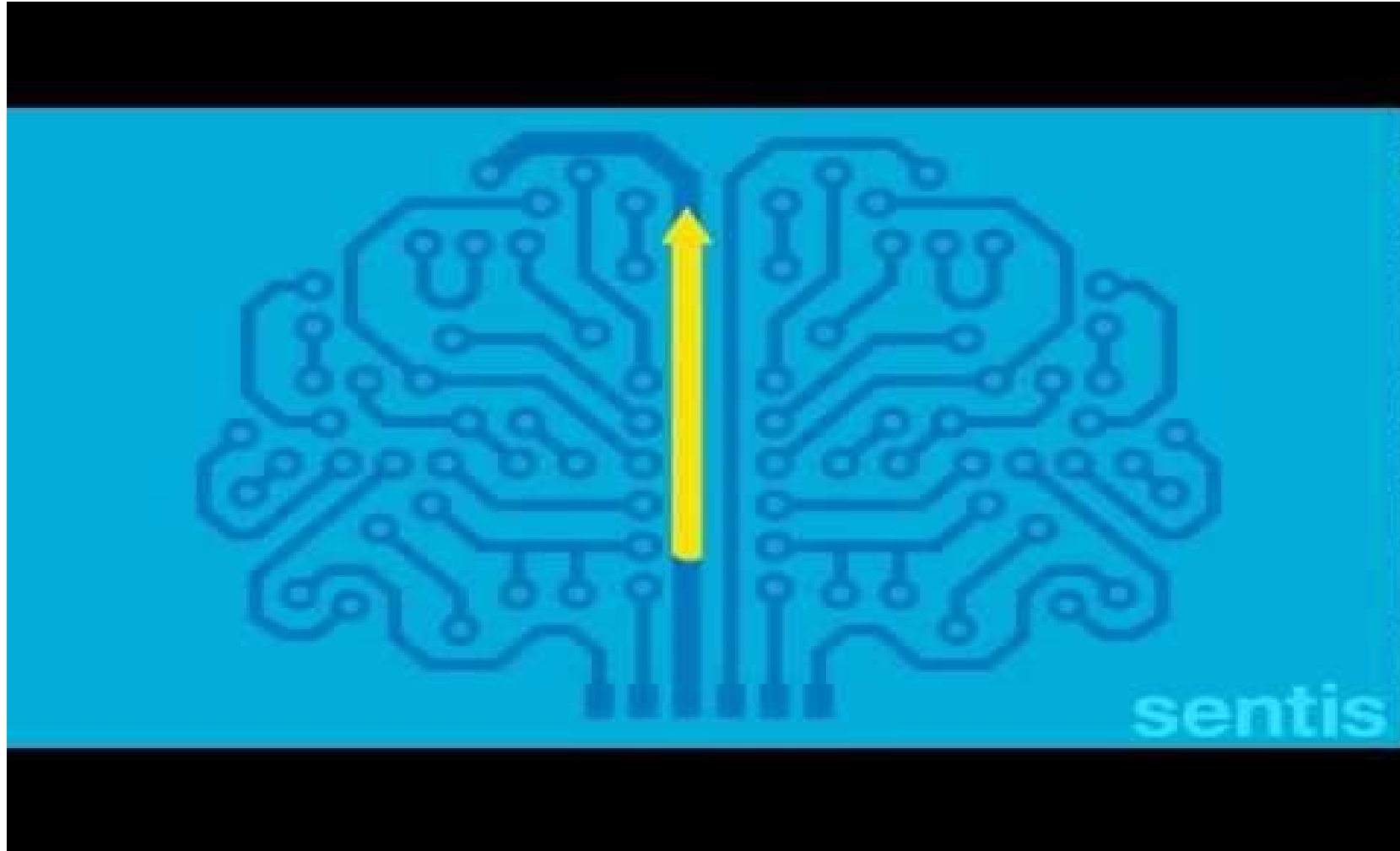
NEUROPLASTICITY



We have the **capacity to heal** from our trauma and change.

We can literally learn to **rewire our brains.**

NEUROPLASTICITY - PATTERNS, HABITS, PATHWAYS



COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THEORY



Situations happen. Each situation affects what we say in our head - **THINK**; what we feel in our bodies - **FEEL**; and what we do in response - **DO**.

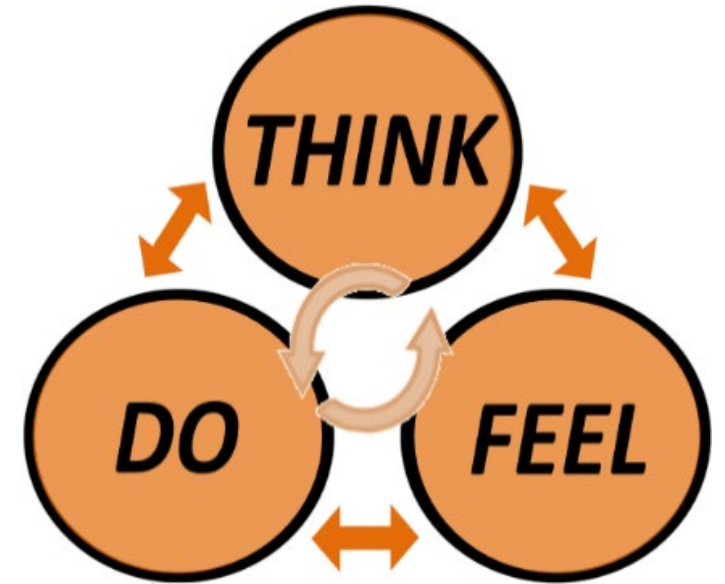
These become our automatic responses.

We can get stuck in unhelpful Think-Feel-Do Cycles.

CBT skills help us:

- Identify our think, feel, do cycles
- Pause, and use a skill to disrupt unhelpful cycles, and
- Do something different than we would normally do

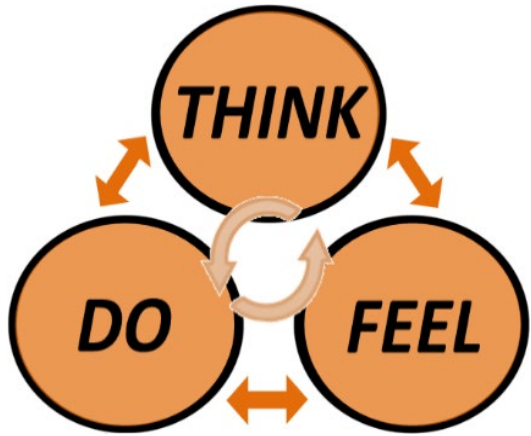
Over time, with repeated practice, disrupting old patterns by doing something different...
we increase our ability to change.



THINK-FEEL-DO CYCLE



SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR CHANGE



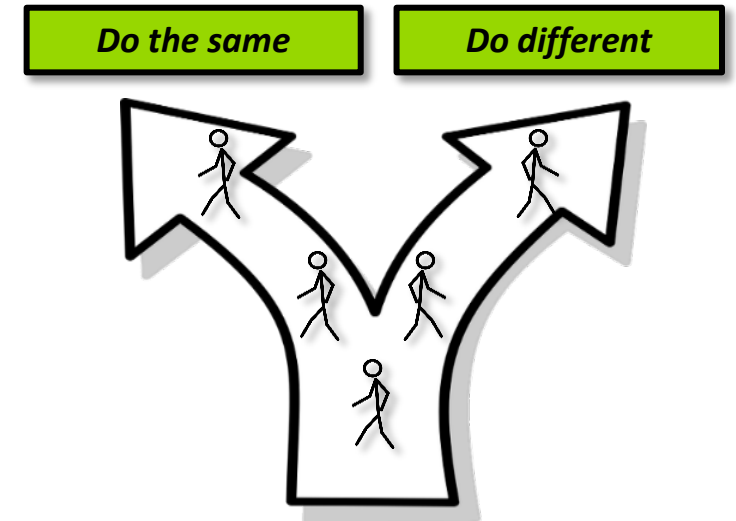
See It



Stop It



Disrupt It



Make a Choice

SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR CHANGE

We asked our young people:
What is your relationship with
Roca, and what is CBT?

REVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS



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Thank You!



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