

SPORT FOR HEALING

The Case For Sport As a Medium to Foster Healing From Psychological Trauma



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SECTION 1

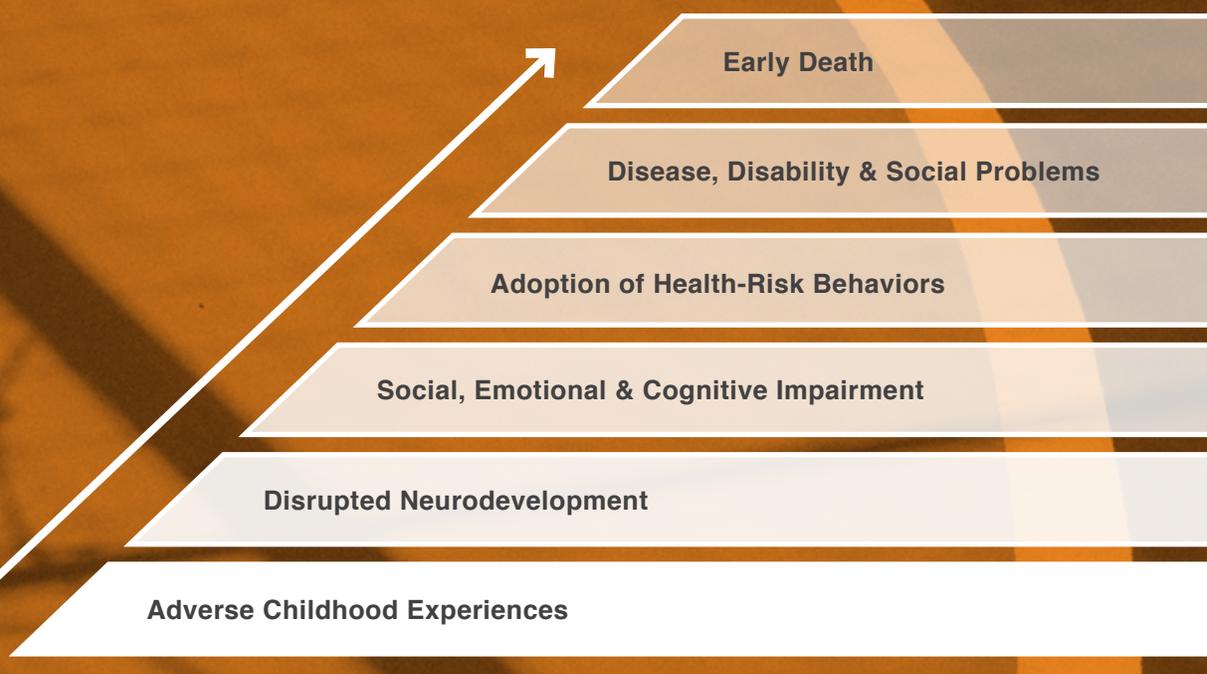
Bad Things Happen — Trauma is the Scar That's Left Behind

Scary, violent, neglectful, abusive, isolating, and painful things happen. They happen more often and to more people than we might think.

Bad things happen publicly, in the form of natural disasters, war, and political upheaval. They also happen privately. Domestic abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse, often occur behind closed doors, in the hidden parts of people's private lives.

When bad things linger in a person's life as pervasive and inescapable experiences, as distracting and intrusive reminders, or profound disruptions to daily functioning, they become a **trauma** — a deep scar that is left behind.

Anatomical and hormonal changes in the brain can also lead to at-risk behaviors that have real impact on health. Data has shown a direct link between adverse childhood experiences and increases in disease, disability and even premature death.



TRAUMA FROM THE PAST HAS SERIOUS LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES.

CHART ABOVE — Please Visit: [CDC.Gov/ViolencePrevention/ChildAbuseAndNeglect/AceStudy/Index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html) to learn more about the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences

The consequences of trauma can be long-term and complex. The earlier in life the trauma occurs, the more devastating the consequences. Adverse childhood experiences interfere with brain development. This, in turn, disrupts physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.

TYPICAL STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

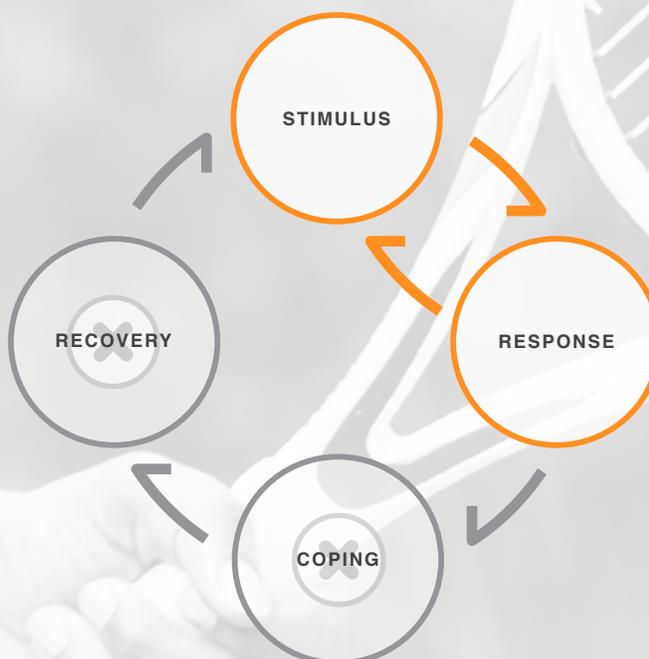
We each have a natural coping mechanism when we experience a stressful stimulus:

1. **FIRST, WE RESPOND.** This is our knee-jerk reaction, often happening before we can think it through.
2. **OUR COPING MECHANISMS WORK** as we start to face the reality of the situation.
3. **FINALLY, WE RECOVER** and return to a relatively stable state to be able to handle the next stressful stimulus that may come our way. This is a normal and functional mechanism we need in order to handle stress.



DISRUPTED STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

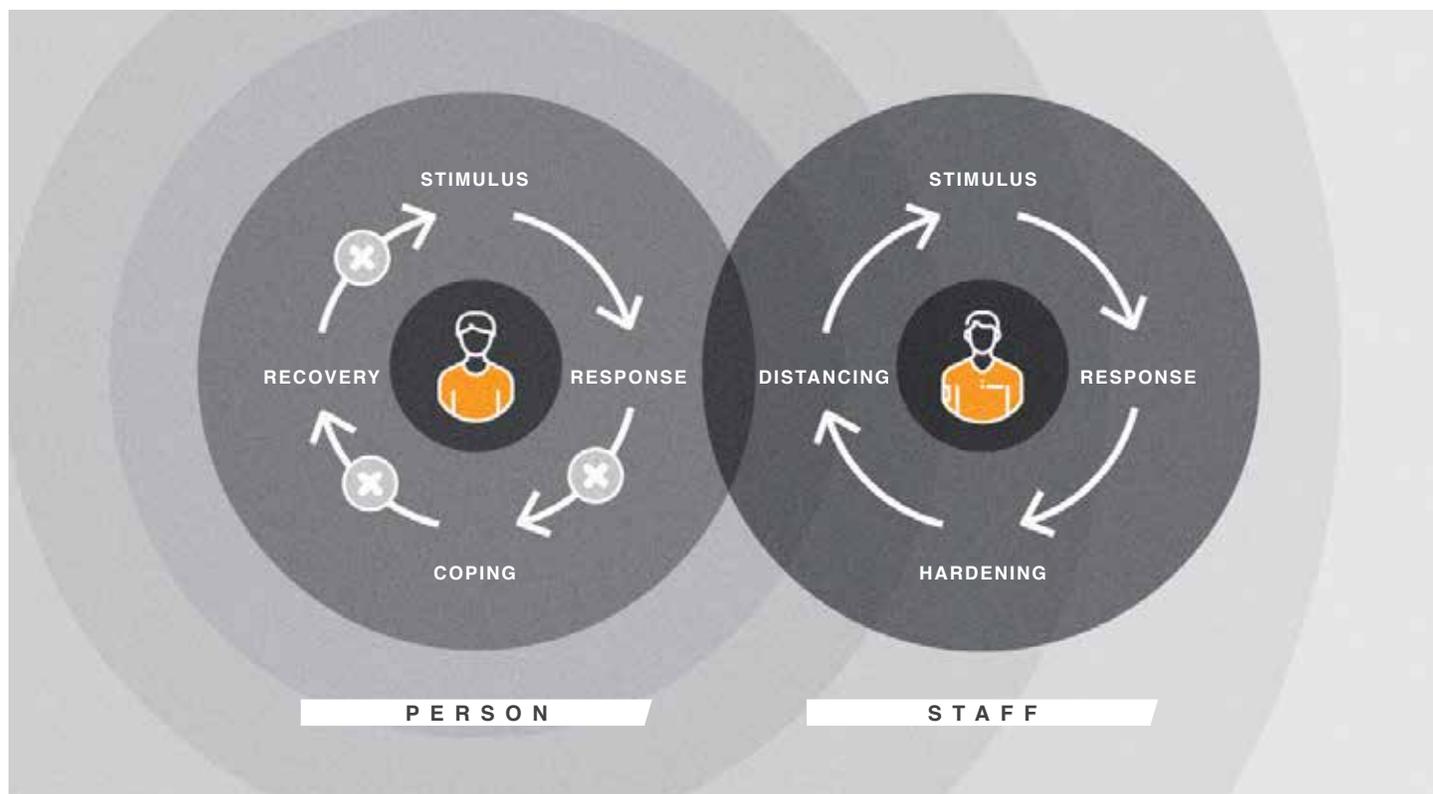
Trauma can begin to happen when the hormonal release is too much and our ability to respond and cope becomes compromised. A person in this state has a much tougher time getting to recovery, and in some cases never returns to a state of recovery.



SECTION 2

Trauma Pushes Away the People That Want to Help

People affected by trauma work hard to get through the day. Their bodies run on overdrive to hold everything together. Small events trigger disproportionately large reactions. The world says, “*Stay calm, sit still, and pay attention.*” But, their brain says “*Run! Fight! Shut down!*”



If we could hear the inner story of a person affected by trauma, it might sound like this:

“I’m exhausted. You see my distracted eyes darting to the door, and you think I’m inattentive. But, I’m actually preparing for the next bad thing to come through that door. You see me amped up. I might shout or even throw a punch. You think I’m combative. Maybe the best way I know to keep myself safe is to hit first. The truth is, I’m doing the best I can.”

Tragically, one of trauma’s most damaging effects is how it effects key relationships. A person affected by trauma is already trying to manage their flooded coping system. Seemingly small disruptions and stressors can cause intense reactions, from aggression to withdrawal. These reactions, in turn, become incoming stimuli for the staff who are charged with helping this person. Staff will have their own response and coping. If they can’t manage their own reactions to this person, a vicious cycle begins.

This cycle drives a hardening of the relationship; staff begin to pull away from interactions, and may withhold the extra effort needed to connect with this person. The eventual result is a distancing that fuels the sense of isolation — or shame — that the person affected by trauma may already be experiencing.

SECTION 3

How Healing Happens

**The good news: healing is possible.**

From providing trauma-informed resources to youth workers in post-Tsunami Thailand, to designing an out-of-school mental health program in Gaza, to training camp staff in Newton, CT, we have seen firsthand the creative and impactful ways that individuals, families, schools, sport programs, and entire communities enable healing.

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT HOW HEALING HAPPENS:

There is no single right way to heal. Historically, talk therapy has been the treatment of choice, but it's not the only way to heal. Now, dance, art, yoga, music, theater, and sport have been shown to foster significant therapeutic benefits.



Innovative, community-centered approaches are necessary. In the absence of access to definitive clinical care, which is the case for the vast majority of people suffering in the world, there remain profound ways to foster healing by leveraging existing assets within each individual, family, and community.



People help heal people. No matter the medium of care (yoga, sport, art, etc.), it is the people involved who often make all the difference. Clinicians, social workers, community mental health workers, teachers, coaches, parents, grandparents, and friends can all play a crucial role.

THE PATHWAY TO HEALING

4 BETTER PLACE

The primary goal of our sport intervention is for participants to leave in a better place than when they started. Their story of “self” becomes more positive, and they describe feeling more normal. These self-descriptions are accompanied by an ability to plan for the future and consistently make healthy choices.

3 DAILY FUNCTIONING

When participants consistently attend a program, they learn to work on their ability to regulate, and start experiencing more success across the 4 C's. We may see a reduction of dys-regulated symptoms. Participants' ability to handle bad stress and deal with daily struggles should start to improve.

2 REGULATION

At its core, healing revolves around promoting regulation, helping individuals synchronize their brain and body, and better manage their emotions and actions.

There are four important ways to promote regulation. We call these the 4 Cs:

CONNECTION *Building positive relationships and group affiliations*

COMPETENCE *Experiencing the power of building skills and self-efficacy*

CONTROL *Gaining a sense of choice in important parts of one's life*

CONTRIBUTION *Opportunities to give of oneself to something or someone else of importance*

1 PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

Showing up is the first step toward healing. If a participant isn't regularly present for the program/service, they can't benefit from it. When we look closely at attendance, barriers to access often surface.

SECTION 4

Harnessing the Power of Sport to Heal

Something special exists inside sport. The more closely we look, the more we uncover its therapeutic potential. With purposeful coach training, attentive management of the competition, and intentional player development, we've seen sport emerge as a remarkable medium for therapeutic outcomes.

Sport has an inherent set of factors that foster regulation and healing. Each element describes a unique and powerful aspect of sport and how it can align with core healing principles and approaches.

Home Field Advantage



Intentionally designed, sport can be the place that fosters safety and security. It represents consistency and predictability; it is the participant's "home field," where they are valued, and wanted, as an important part of the team.

Seasons of Play



The structure and schedule of sport activities promotes future focus and creates opportunities to practice leaving the past behind and attend to the present.

Competence



Sport skills are often developed rapidly. Some of these skills are necessary for healing.

Physical Activity



Sport requires physical activity. Physical activity promotes healing, and body work is a critical component of sport success.

Team & Community Focus



Relationships, kinship, and identity development are central to the sport experience and the healing process.

Immersive & Engaging



Sport engages a person wholly in a powerful way that promotes thinking, feeling, acting, and being fully present in the moment.

Organized & Structured



Sport has specific rules of play and scheduled activities that create predictability and expectations for behavior.

Decision-Making



Sport gives players many opportunities to make choices that bear immediate consequences.

Real Stakes



Competition in sport gives participants the chance to test their ability to respond to stress in "situations that matter."

SECTION 5

Examples From the Field



It has been our pleasure and privilege to work with some of the global leaders in the emerging field of sport for healing, also known as *sports-based stabilization*, a term coined by Dr. Wendy D'Andrea from the New School for Social Research.

We've worked in refugee camps, residential treatment centers, Boys and Girls Clubs and a wide range of community settings, using both single-sport, and multi-sport interventions. We've seen, the innovative ways that coaches, league administrators, and players are reimagining their sports to foster healing.

FOUR EXAMPLES OF WHAT SPORT FOR HEALING CAN LOOK LIKE:

Provide soccer referees a blue card¹ to use along with their red and yellow cards, to acknowledge positive behavior. In the event of a tie, blue card accrual decides the winner of a game. The referee can now reinforce sportsmanship, instead of just enforcing rules and administering punishments.

THE BLUE CARD

Coaches shift their focus from the run of play to the bench, working with players on what to do the next time they play, instead of shouting instructions while they're trying to make important decisions.

COACH THE BENCH/PRAISE THE PLAY

Create a “zone” or place behind the substitution bench for players and coaches to visit to cool down and regroup after intense play, or to warm up and prepare to join the run of play. This is a safe space for players to go when the stress of the competition is too high.

THE ZONE

Wait until players cool down, change clothes, and return to a regulated state before having the traditional end of game “high five” and “good game” exchanges. The “high five” feels more meaningful, and players have a chance to connect in a more intentional way.

DELAYED HIGH-FIVE

¹ The Blue Card was created and pioneered by Street Soccer USA

SECTION 6**Build Your Capacity
to Use Sport to Heal**

ARE YOU READY TO EXPERIENCE THE HEALING POWER OF SPORT?

Facilitate a
trauma dialogue.

Involve your staff, stakeholders, and beneficiaries
in conversations about trauma in your community.

Help your staff become
trauma-informed.

Seek out training, distribute resources,
and start the learning process.

Develop
trauma-designed
programming.

Adjust and adapt your activities and programming
to foster greater healing outcomes by drawing
from trauma-informed techniques and approaches.
Design your sport activities to promote develop-
ment of the 4 Cs.

Build a
trauma-sensitive
organization.

Engage at the leadership level and drive an
overall philosophy and approach to understanding
trauma that shapes each person and each
function of your organization.

SECTION 7

Team Up With Edgework

WE TURN RESEARCH INTO ACTION.

At Edgework, we work with organizations and communities who want to help their populations move forward on a healing pathway, but don't have access to definitive care. We seek to understand how the most effective treatment methodologies work, studying individuals and organizations that push the boundaries of healing work in community settings. We then put this research into practice, creating accessible frameworks and approaches.

WE HELP THE HELPERS.

We are capacity builders, working with sport programs around the world to help them become leaders in the emerging field of sport for healing. We can help you kick-off a trauma dialogue in your organization. Our team of master trainers is excited to help your staff become trauma-informed and learn the principles and practices of sport for healing.

WE'RE HERE TO WORK WITH YOU.

We constantly look for organizations that are ready to explore the power of sport for healing. If you are thinking about transforming your organization to become more trauma-sensitive, we are excited about the opportunity to work with you.

**WHERE WE
HAVE WORKED**

International: Canada, Ethiopia, Gaza, Iraq, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Thailand, Zambia, Zimbabwe

US: California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Washington DC

Who We Have Worked With

- ▶ AMPJF MALI
- ▶ BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF CANADA
- ▶ CARE INTERNATIONAL
- ▶ DOC WAYNE YOUTH SERVICES
- ▶ GALZ AND GOALS
- ▶ GRASSROOT SOCCER
- ▶ JAYS CARE FOUNDATION
- ▶ JUSTICE RESOURCE INSTITUTE
- ▶ KIDS PLAY INTERNATIONAL
- ▶ LEGACY YOUTH TENNIS AND EDUCATION
- ▶ MATHARE YOUTH SPORTS ASSOCIATION
- ▶ MERCY CORPS
- ▶ METROLACROSSE
- ▶ NEWTOWN PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
- ▶ PLAY RUGBY USA
- ▶ SPECIAL OLYMPICS
- ▶ SPIRIT OF SOCCER
- ▶ SQUASHBUSTERS
- ▶ STREET SOCCER USA
- ▶ UNICEF
- ▶ UP2US SPORTS
- ▶ URBAN INITIATIVES
- ▶ WASHINGTON NATIONALS YOUTH BASEBALL ACADEMY
- ▶ WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION

