

# Helping through Understanding

## Part 1 Trauma sensitivity



Some ideas for dealing in a trauma-sensitive manner with refugee children in daycare, school and residential accommodation ...

by Susanne Stein

A Supplement to the trauma booklets in many languages available to download for free at [www.susannestein.de](http://www.susannestein.de)

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# Preliminary remarks

- ▶ Since 2013 I have supported refugee families privately and on a voluntary basis. I met loving parents who were sometimes helpless and often very unhappy about the consequences of their children's trauma.
- ▶ Since 2014, I have published trauma booklets for these children and their parents, which are intended to explain simply but accurately what traumatic experiences can do to the children's souls and how we, all of us “caregivers,” can help them before, and during, therapy.
- ▶ This impulse gave rise to a larger project. The two booklets are currently published in 16 and 13 editions on the Internet and have been printed thousands of times. The numerous hits on the website are a sad testimony to the great need.
- ▶ This project was only possible with the help of therapists, translators, my internet graphic artists and large donations.
- ▶ The two papers on the topic of “Helping through Understanding” come from my seminars. They are hereby made available to a wider public.



2018, meeting the Federal President at an event to honor the project

# What does trauma mean?



Trauma is a terrifying experience that leaves a person completely overwhelmed mentally and physically and permanently changed. The core of the trauma is dramatic powerlessness and fear.

It is important to note:

Horror is not the same as traumatization: When people experience horror and remain able to act or quickly recover, we speak of terrible experiences or stresses, but not of traumatization.

Therefore: Not all refugee children are traumatized. However, after war and flight, the probability is high and should always be taken into account.

# What happens to the brain when there is trauma?

The relationships/cooperation between the three parts of the brain (cerebrum, limbic system, brain stem) become confused:

Normally, the cerebral cortex thinks and assesses the current situation. The limbic system contributes feelings, the brain stem does its basic work such as controlling heartbeat and breathing while sleepy. Everything is in the green.

In a dangerous, fearful situation, the brain stem takes over the command: fight - flight - freeze! Whatever it instructs is for survival! Then the scepter is given back - normally.

Traumatization occurs when the fearful situation is so overwhelmingly terrible or so persistent that the brain stem remains in a state of alarm and dominates the other two parts of the brain for a long time - continuously or selectively.

Whatever we do should allow the brain stem to calm down and return to a productive, sleepy state.

This representation was inspired by Dr. Andreas Krüger, u.a. in ders. Powerbook Erste Hilfe für die Seele, Elbe und Krüger Verlag, 2015, Volume 1 page 44 ff.

# The result of the trauma in a picture: The brain stem/“reptilian brain” remains in an alarm state



The clever fox here represents the cerebral cortex, thinking. The cat symbolizes the limbic system, the feeling. And the crocodile represents the brain stem, which regulates basic physical functions and protects survival.

This representation was inspired by Dr. Andreas Krüger, u.a. in ders. Powerbook Erste Hilfe für die Seele, Elbe und Krüger Verlag, 2015, Volume 1 page 44 ff.

# Consequences of Trauma

The result of trauma is that the brain is constantly on alert, and this can result in the following:

## **Overarousal**

The child (or adult) is “overexcited.” These include restlessness, increased alertness, sleep disturbances, repetitive nervous movements.

## **Avoidance**

The child (or adult) shows “avoidance behavior”: internal and external withdrawal, little emotionality, avoidance of certain paths, places or situations

## **Sudden flashes of memory**

The child (or adult) experiences “flashbacks”: sudden, massive memories, possibly associated with uncontrolled panic and physical stress reactions or numbness and inner absence.

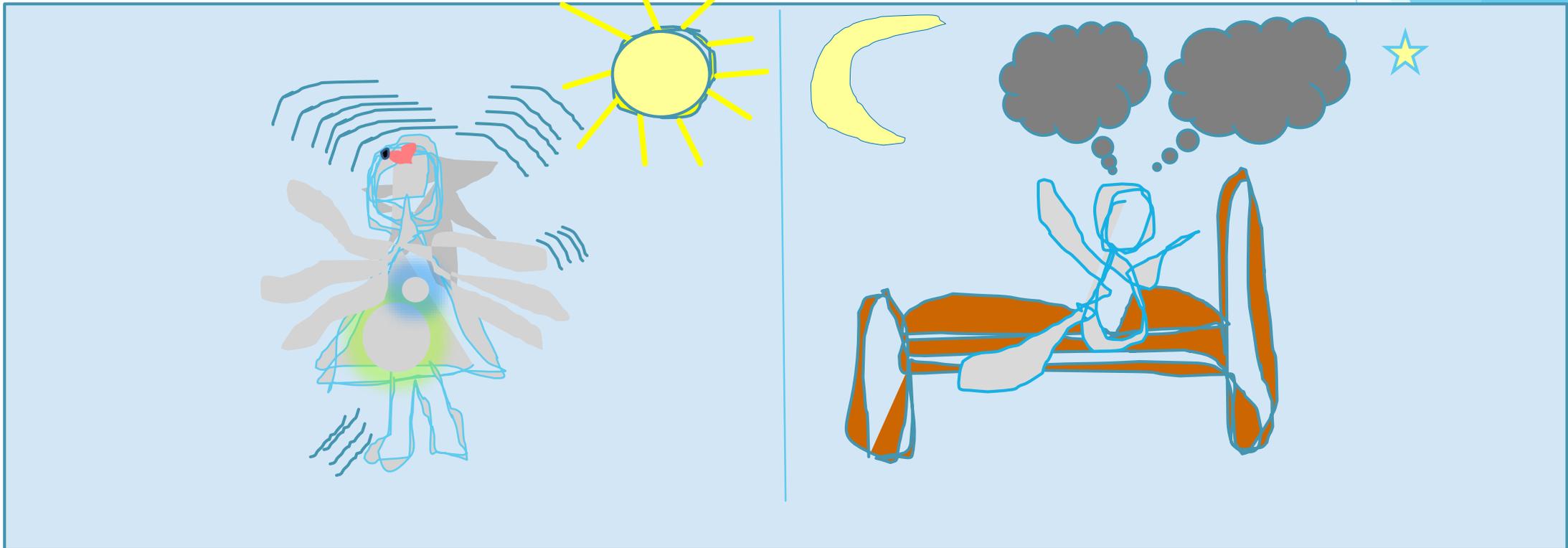
According to Annette Horster-Schepermann

**Some typical signs of trauma-related problems can be found on the following pages.**



# Possible signs of trauma consequences: The child is very restless

little concentration, a lot of excitement, sleeping problems, biting nails...



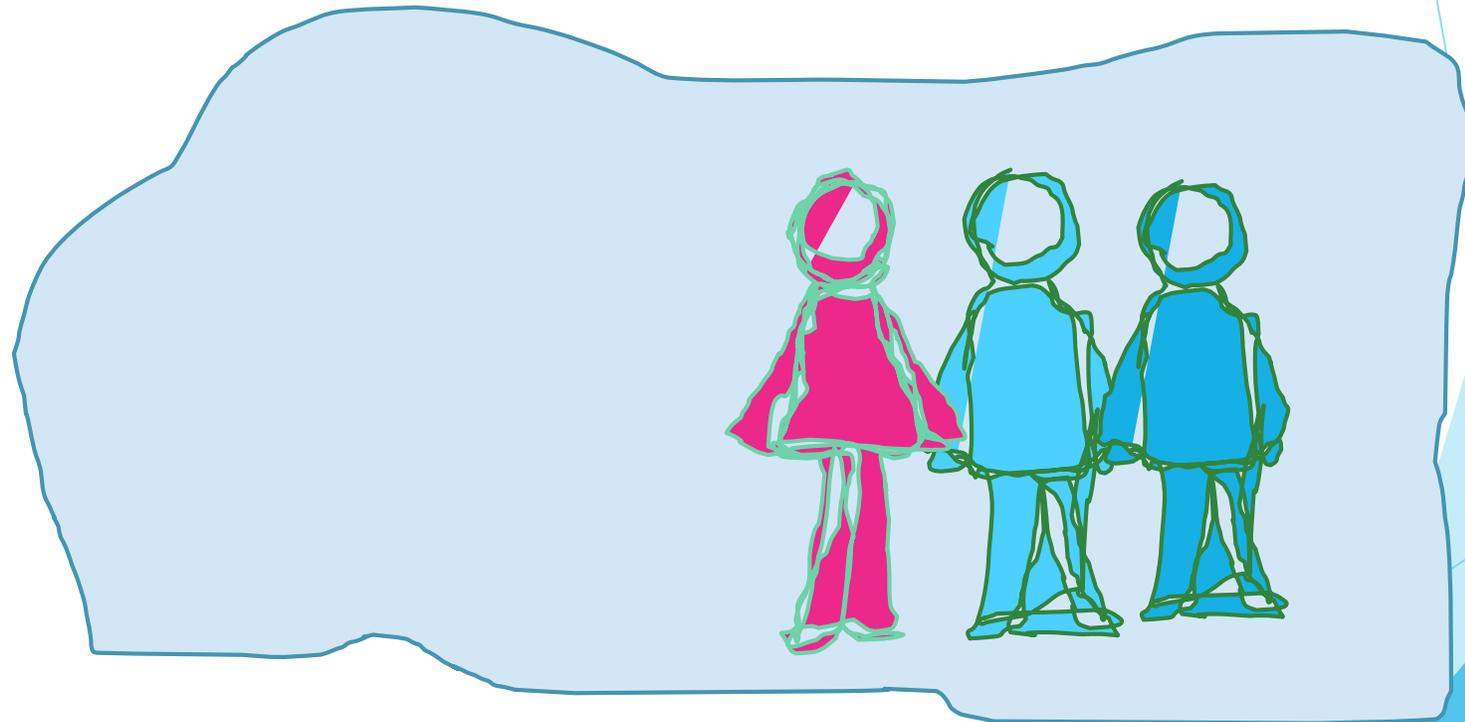
# The child is often withdrawn

sad, passive, listless

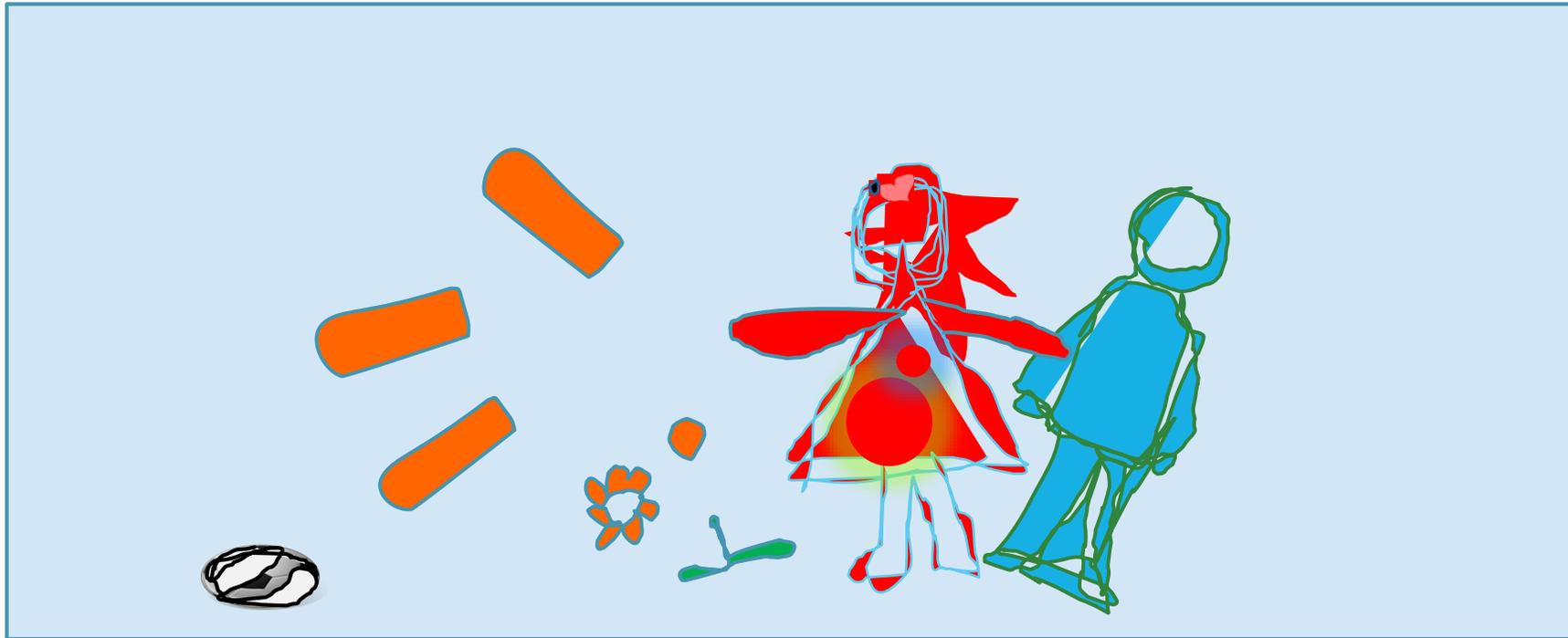


# The child is or feels so lonely

few friends, few interests

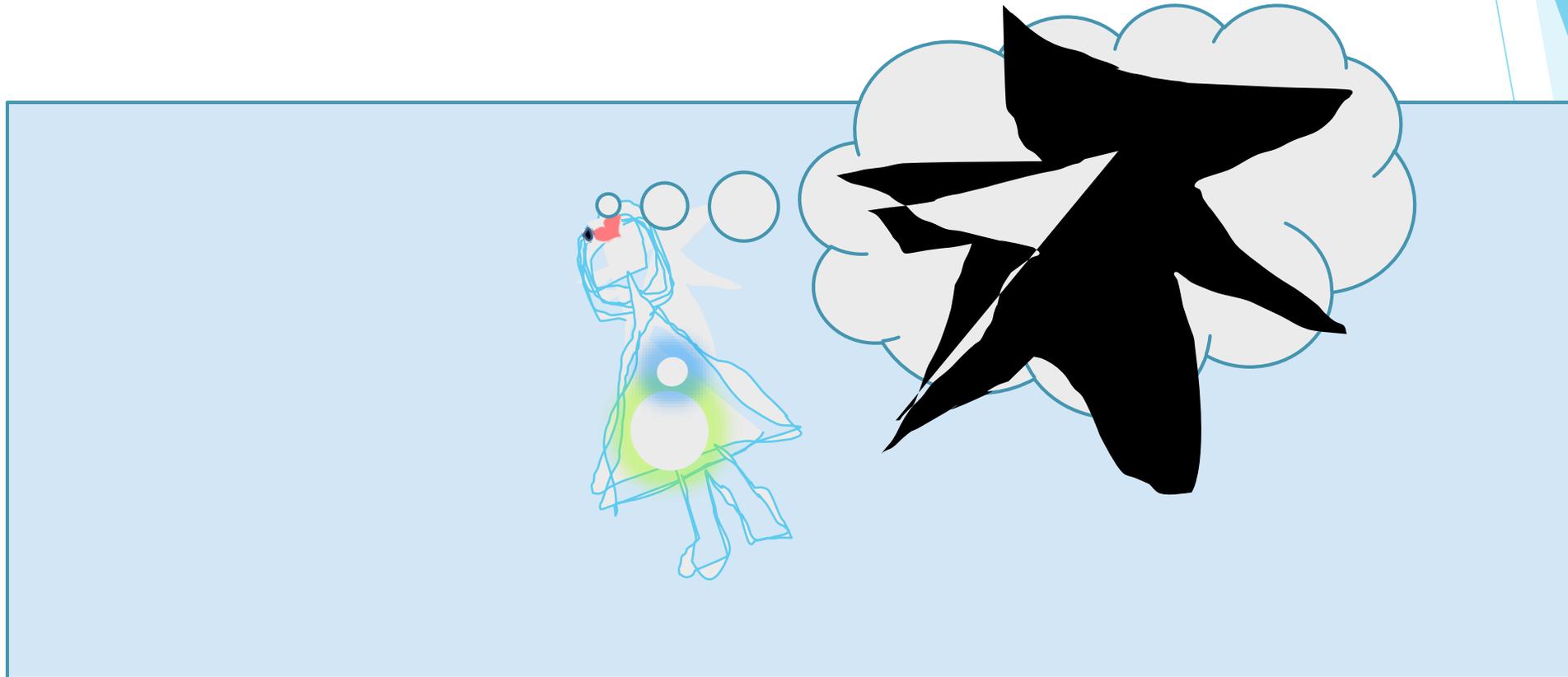


The child is sometimes aggressive  
and suddenly lashes out and breaks something



# The child suddenly has bad memories called flashbacks

he screams, he freezes, he may no longer know where he is



The children have other problems: pain,  
crying or..... or .....



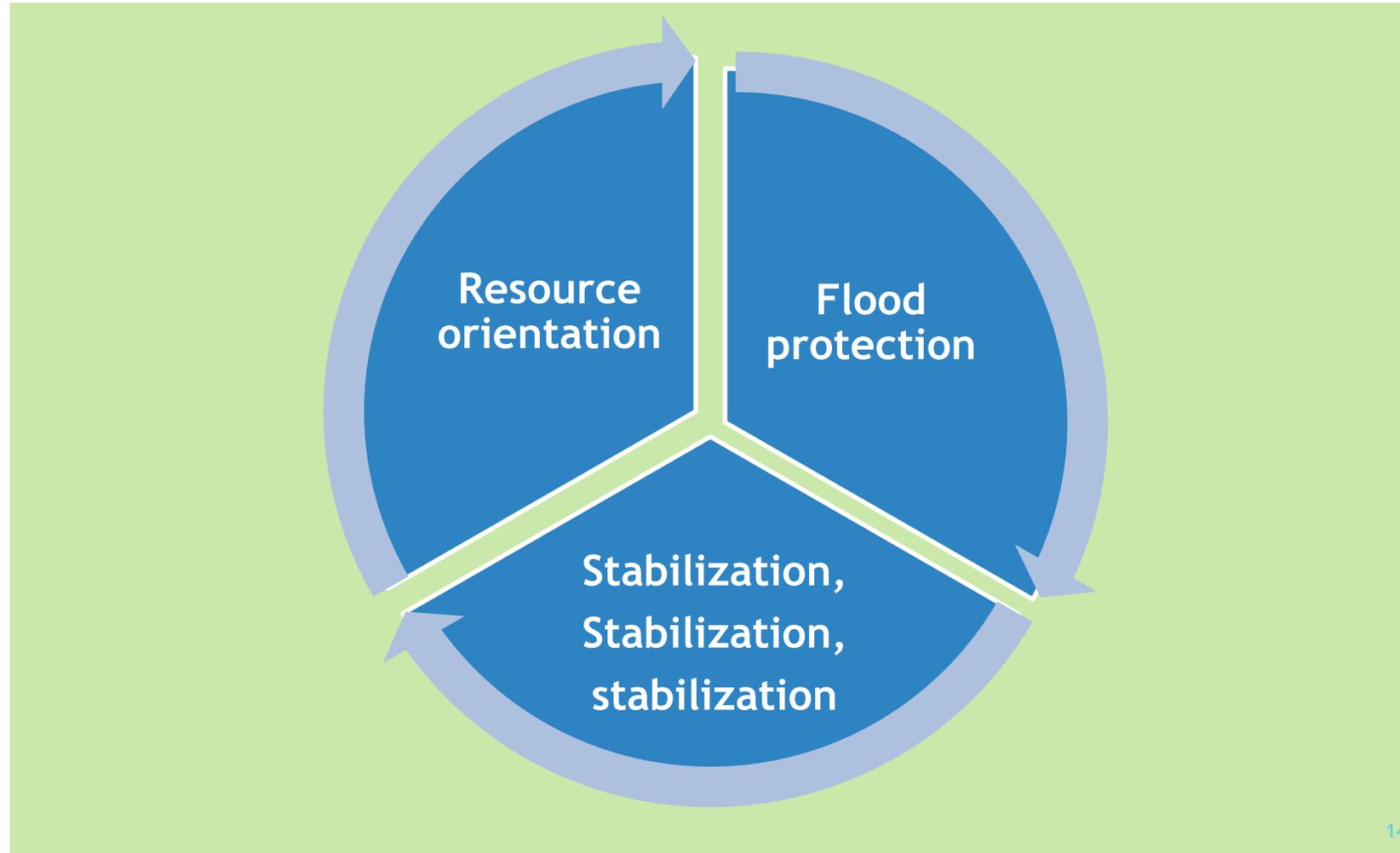
# My compass for trauma sensitivity



## First of all, what does trauma sensitivity mean?

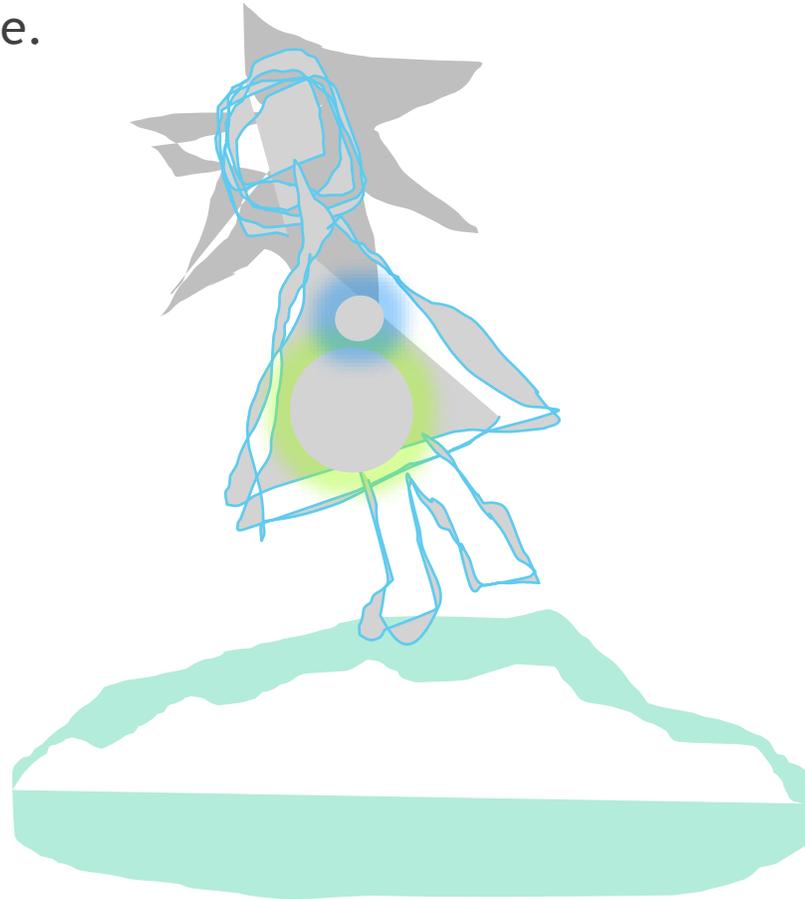
- We are willing to reach out to people who have had bad experiences.
- We assume that after war and flight there can be traumatization that influences people's experiences and behavior.
- We do not treat the trauma/the wound, rather we strengthen the protective space that the person builds around it.
- We don't ask for details, we listen, we may ask "forward", about successful rescues, ways out, wishes for the future...
- We know that we can help people in everyday life and in healing: Calm the “crocodile”, strengthen the “cat” and the “fox”
- We use our options intuitively and systematically, for example with the compass for trauma-sensitive pedagogy
- If necessary, we advise children and parents in individual discussions and use the trauma booklets (see [www.susannestein.de](http://www.susannestein.de))
- Since our support is sometimes not enough, we network with trauma counseling centers and advise on therapy options.
- Since the social stabilization of families is often the most urgent need at the beginning, we clarify to what extent this is present and refer further if necessary.

# The compass for trauma sensitivity in everyday educational life



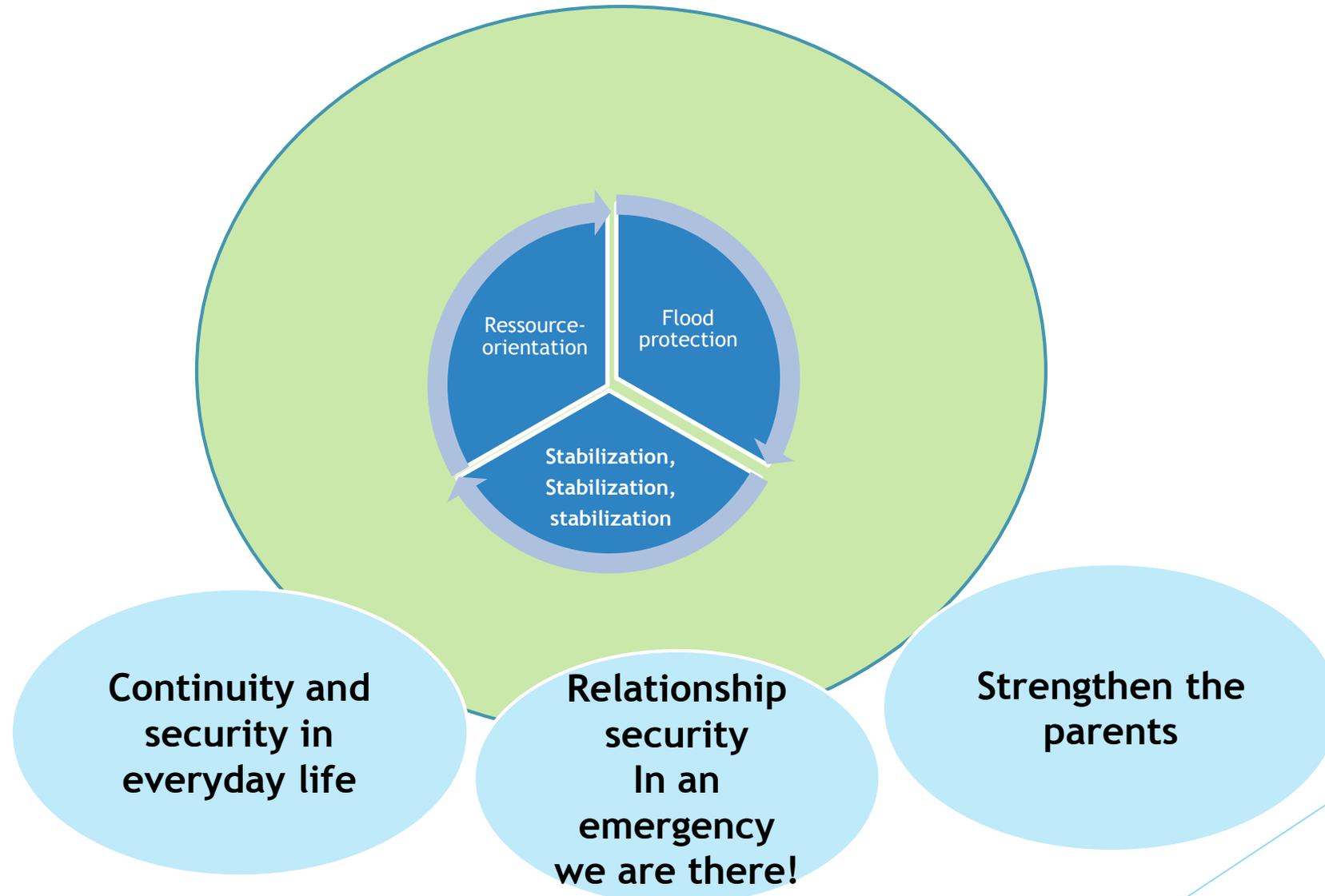
# Why stabilization?

Traumatic experiences pull the ground out from under your feet. One's worldview is shaking. The image of parents is changing. The self-image wavers. It stays that way for a long time.



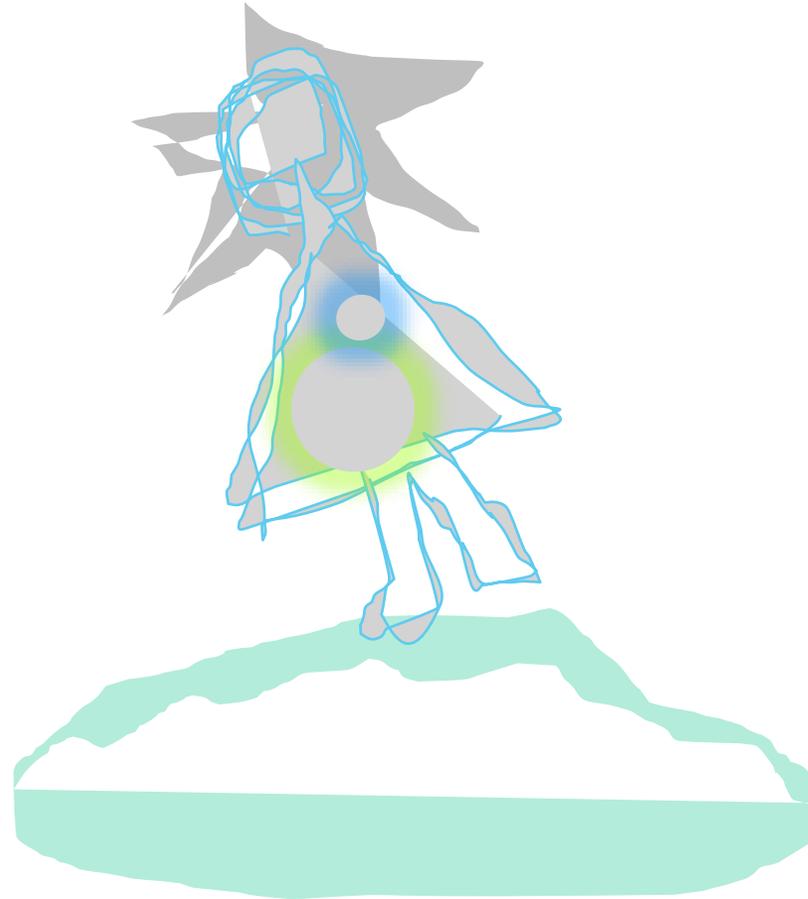
# What does stabilization mean in daycare, school, ...?

## What can we do?

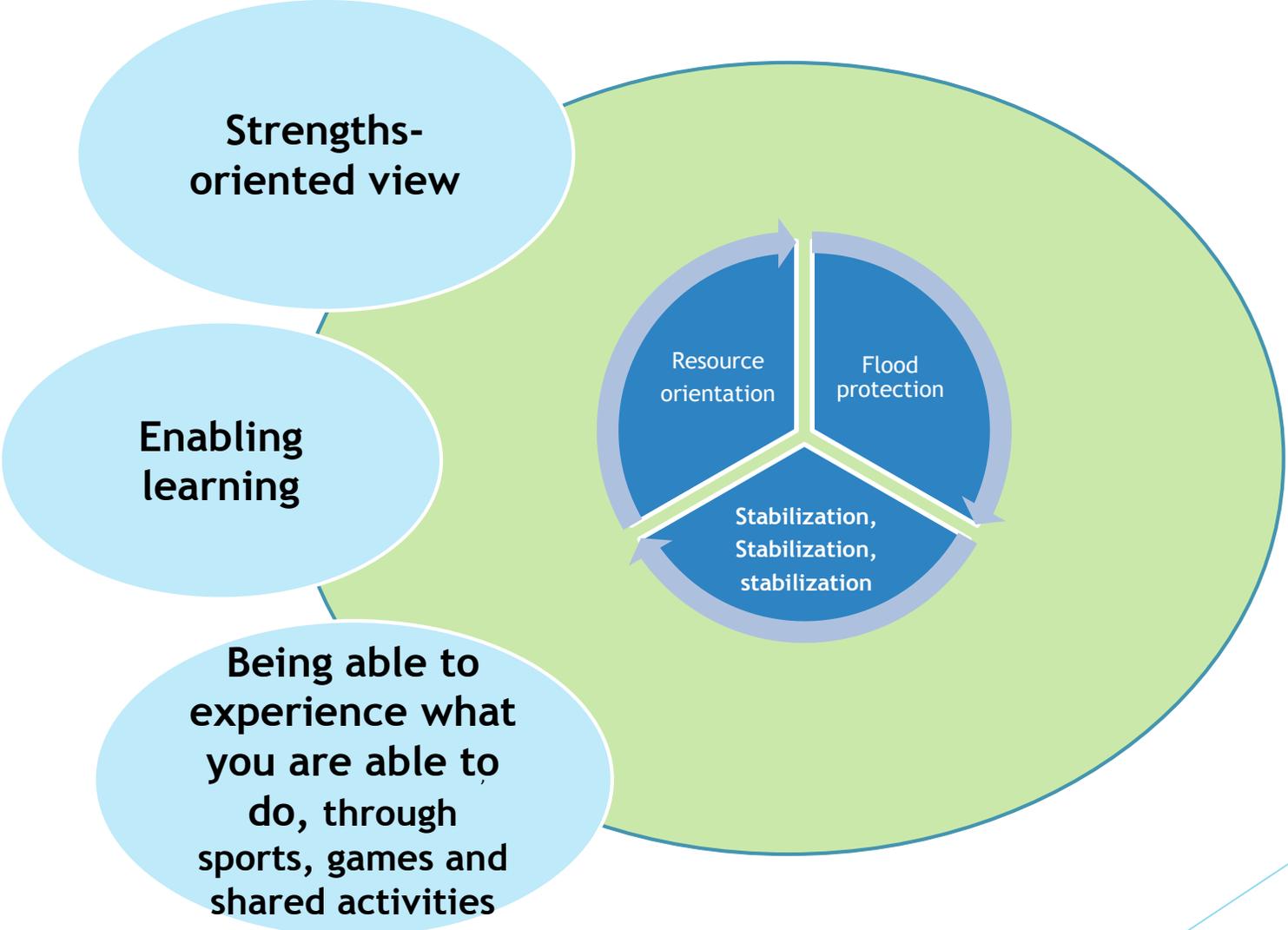


# Why resource orientation?

Traumatic experiences essentially consist of fear and feelings of powerlessness. Experiencing your own strengths helps against fear and powerlessness.

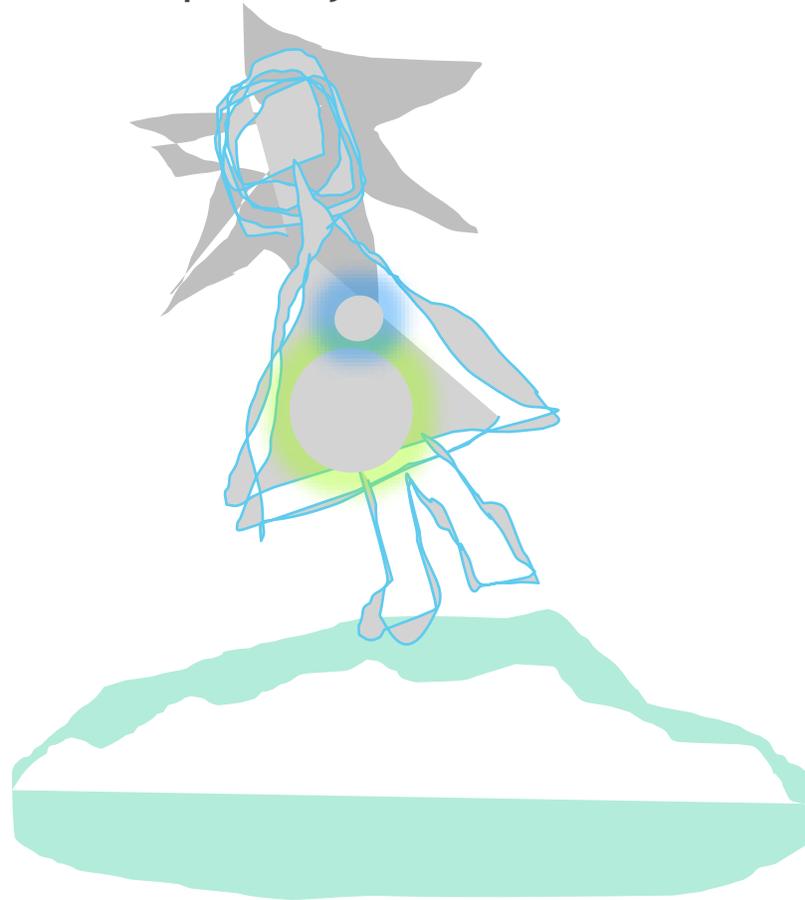


# What does resource orientation mean in daycare, schools ...? What can we do?

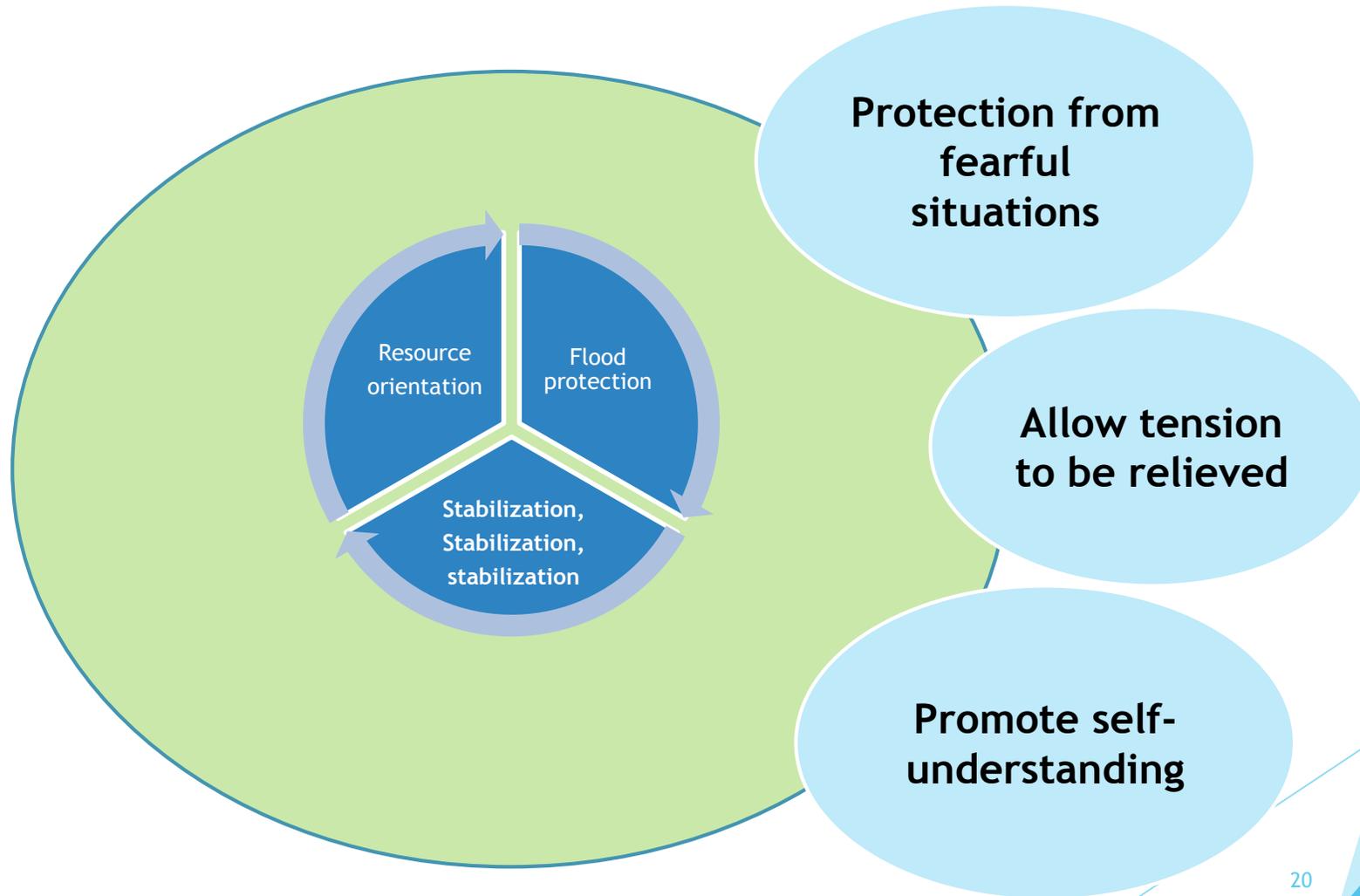


# Why flood protection?

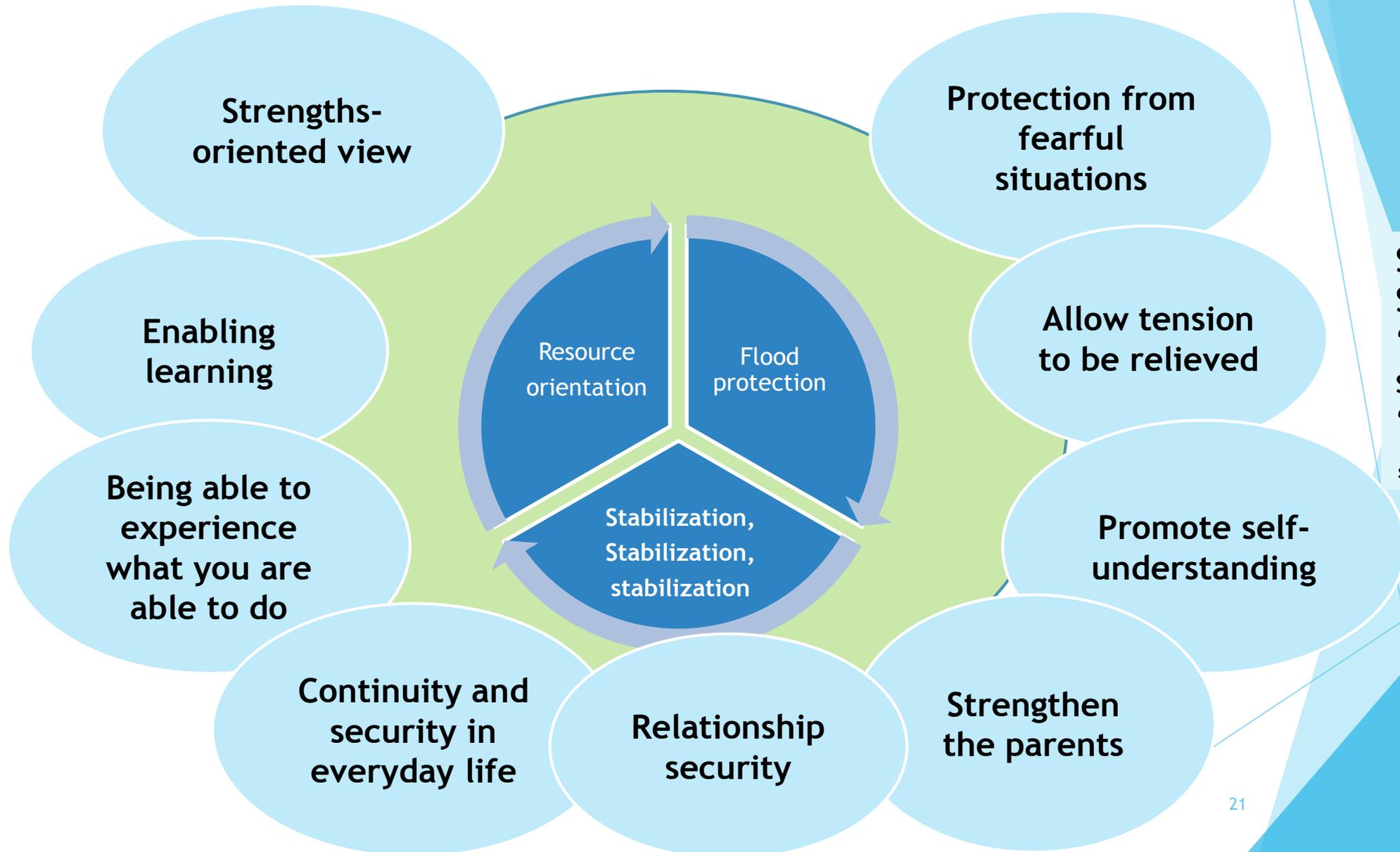
A traumatized child is overly anxious for good reason. It wants to protect itself. Each new fear reinforces the old fear or possibly activates the memory of the traumatic situation.



# What does flood protection mean in daycare, schools ...? What can we do?



# Elements of the Trauma Compass at a glance



So always:  
Soothe the  
“crocodile”,  
strengthen the  
“fox and the  
„cat”.

# Final note

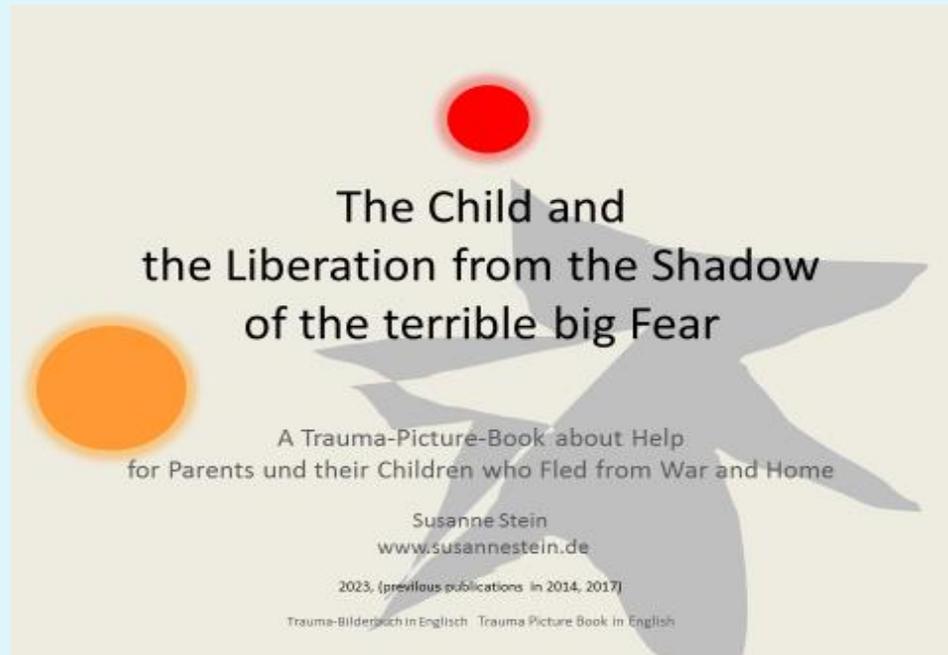
with some statements from Annette Horster-Schepermann

- ▶ Your interest in the fate of the refugee families and dealing with it professionally is already very helpful.
- ▶ If the climate in facilities such as daycare centers, schools, residential accommodation... is made positive for refugee families, this is an essential, effective help. It gives self-healing opportunities a chance.
- ▶ Residential accommodation, crèches, daycare centers and schools are of utmost importance as “safe places” for healing and integration.
- ▶ Psychoeducation, which promotes self-understanding and can have a very relieving effect, is possible in many facilities, e.g. with the trauma booklets.
- ▶ Trauma therapy belongs in the hands of trained child trauma therapists. Networking with them is therefore very important.

# The two trauma booklets as counseling tools

see Helping through Understanding, Part 2 on the Internet

- ▶ The Trauma Picture Book for children and their parents in 16 languages



- ▶ The Trauma Picture Sheet for parents in 13 languages



Always free on [www.susannestein.de](http://www.susannestein.de)

# Acknowledgments and information

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Also from Dr. Andreas Krüger, child and adolescent psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Hamburg, I learned a lot.

English translation support by google translator and Moshe A.J. Mitchell

You are welcome to send me your experience reports or your own suggestions for the compass for trauma-sensitive work.

All picture books for free download and further information at

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