

ROBERT S. WRIGHT, R.S.W.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MICHAEL MOORE  
PRESIDENT

TELEPHONE } 667-3336  
FACSIMILE 667-1594

# Family and Children's Services of Cumberland County

PO Box 399  
24 Crescent Avenue  
Amherst, N.S.  
B4H 3Z5

THE TRAUMA WORKSHOP:  
WHAT IS IT?  
HOW DOES IT AFFECT US?  
WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

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Robert S. Wright, RSW

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Trauma ..... a definition.

Trauma is defined as physical or psychological injury or the event causing same. Psychological trauma is typified by an emotional shock that makes a lasting impression on the subconscious mind. Understanding this definition of trauma as effect is important.

Trauma ..... is subjective.

The degree to which a tragic event effects us differs from person to person. It is likely that biological, psychological and environmental factors determine the degree to which we are effected. (Consider the studies of resiliency and Darlene Kordich Hall's differentiation between "victimized" children and "traumatized" children)

Trauma ..... How it works.

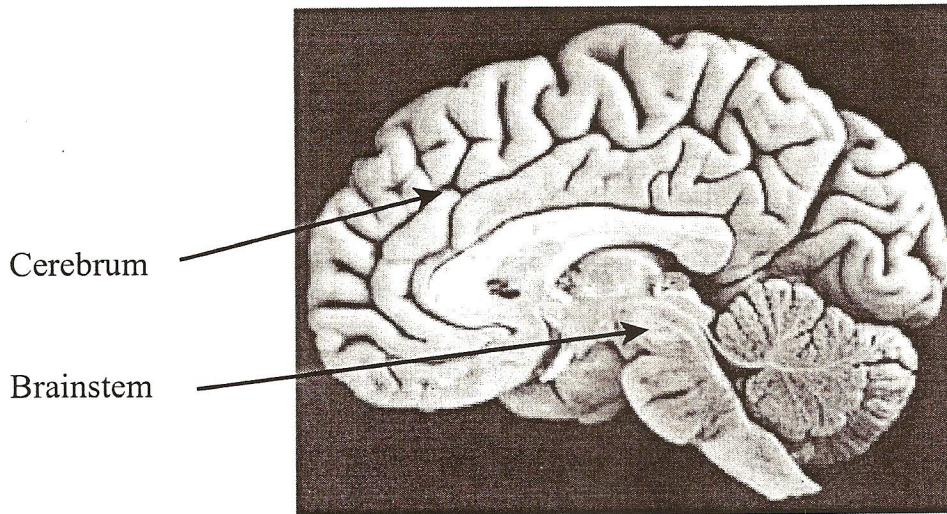
To better understand resiliency to trauma and to more effectively recognize and treat it, I'd like us to consider 2 models for understanding the mechanics of Trauma.

The Neurological Model

In the articles available on David Baldwin's Trauma Information Pages ([www.trauma-pages.com](http://www.trauma-pages.com)), B.D. Perry describes in detail the differing functions of the brain and how they are affected by trauma. Simply put, Perry describes that certain parts of the brain are designed for higher order functions like thinking, while others are dedicated to more primitive functions like reflexes. In the healthy, well developed brain the thinking part of the brain is in a balanced relationship with the reflex center; the thinking center maintaining some resemblance of control.

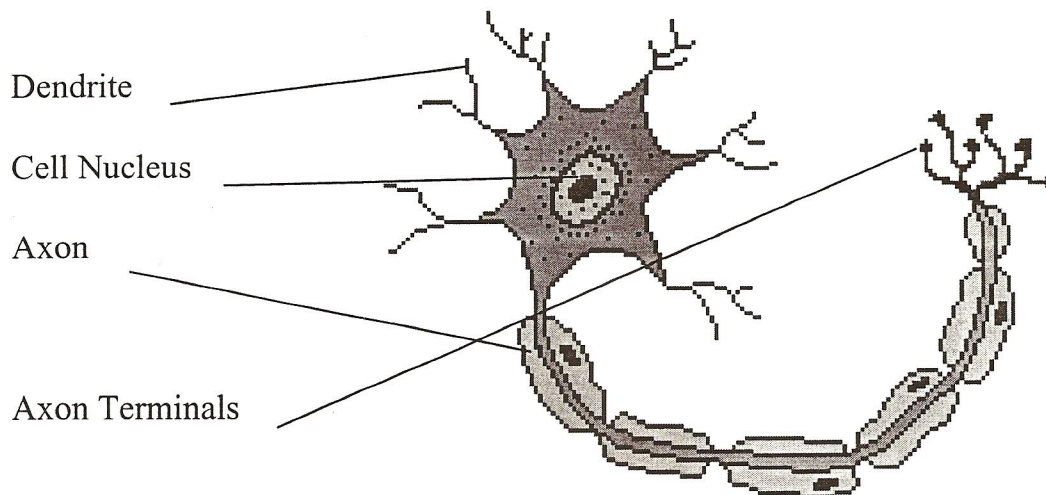
Perry points out that the brain's structure can be effected by environmental stimuli. Like muscles, the areas of the brain that are stimulated grow, change, become stronger. The areas that are less used can weaken and lose their effectiveness. Potentially traumatic events have the effect of stimulating the reflex area of the brain (the fight or flight center) causing this center to become unduly exercised.

## The Thinking Center (Cerebrum) and the Reflex Center (Brain Stem)



More information on the brain and its functioning can be found at the following web sites:  
Traumatic Brain Injury Resource Guide: <http://www.neuroskills.com/index.html?main=tbi/brain.html>  
Virtual Hospital: <http://www.vh.org/Providers/Textbooks/BrainAnatomy/BrainAnatomy.html>

## How Brain Cells Change



1. increase number of dendrites
2. change in structure of axon
3. increase number of axon terminals
4. increase amount and perhaps type of neurotransmitters
5. increase efficiency in reclaiming spent neurotransmitters (re-loading)

