

A decorative border made of watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, and blue, framing the central text.

THE FIRST RELATIONSHIP: CREATING TRAUMA- INFORMED THERAPY ENVIRONMENTS

Sarah Jordan, LPC

Final Project

Trauma-Informed Design Credentialing Course

Summer 2025

Christine Cowart & Janet Roche

Defining Inpatient vs. Outpatient Mental Health Services

Inpatient Mental Health

- Hospital or residential treatment settings
- 24/7 care and supervision
- High safety measures
- Shared patient rooms or dorm-style living
- On-site medical staff and medicine administration
- Communal Spaces, like dining halls and activity rooms
- "Sterile" feeling
- Crisis stabilization and acute focus

Outpatient Mental Health

- Private practices, clinics, and community centers
- Clients attend scheduled sessions, then leave
- Greater emphasis on comfort and normalized settings
- Flexible spaces for different modalities
- Waiting areas often serve multiple ages and populations
- Less restrictive safety measures
- Typically smaller scale
- Emphasis on co-regulation, trust building, and long-term relational work

- Confidentiality and privacy are critical
- Administration of mental health services
- Need for accessibility and ADA compliance
- Staff support spaces

Current Usage of “Typical” Outpatient Mental Health Private Practice Spaces

Space Requirements

- Administrative/Scheduling Area
- Waiting Area
- Restroom
- Treatment Rooms
- Group Spaces (if utilizing group therapy methods)
- Space for Documentation
- Parking/Access to Transportation

Usage

- Waiting room for completion of documentation and space before/after sessions, as well as access to scheduling assistance
- Therapy Rooms for individual (all ages) or couples therapy
- Group Spaces for employee use, workshops, Continuing Education courses, group therapy, or team building

Common Concerns

- Confidentiality
- Noise between treatment rooms
- Storage of supplies
- Safety of staff
- Accessibility
- Burnout risk for staff, as well as lack of separation between clinical use vs. business use, as well as lack of separation from clients
- Aesthetics vs. function
- Lack of access to outdoors and nature

Context: Metro Atlanta & Clinical Relevance

Metro Landscape

- Metro Atlanta Population: 6.3 Million (6th Largest US City)
- Most rapid areas of growth are North Atlanta Suburbs
- Racial Breakdown: ~49% White, 34% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 6% Asian

Mental Health & Trauma

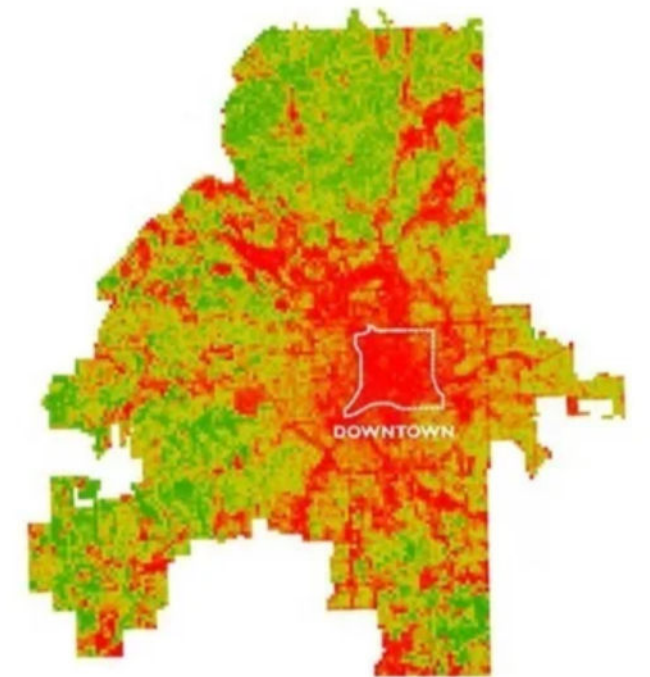
- Nearly 30% of adults in Georgia report mental health concerns
- Among downtown Atlanta residents, 87.8% have experienced trauma, with 46.2% meeting criteria for PTSD
- Mental health diagnoses for children has risen from 10.7% to 16.5% in the last decade
- Rising occurrences of school shootings (Apalachee HS - 2024)

Ecological Integrity

- Metro ATL is one of the fastest growing regions, losing up to 500 acres of forest and open land per week to development
- Atlanta has seen its tree canopy shrink from 48% in 1974 to 38% by the mid 1990s
- Projects like the BeltLine adds 1,300 acres of connected green space, which also displaces low income residents

Land Acknowledgement

- Metro ATL sits on historically significant Indigenous lands, including those of Muscogee Creek, and development of Atlanta often overlooks sacred sites and burial grounds



Forest Cover Map illustrates the lack of tree canopy coverage in Downtown Atlanta in the early stages of this project. (2018)

Applying TiD Spheres to an Outpatient Mental Health Private Practice

1. Policy & Practice

- Therapy Intake Forms
- Transparent Informed Consent Language
- Sliding Fee Scale
- Culturally Competent Continuing Education
- Continued Outside Supervision and Multiple Disciplinary Consultation

2. Design Process

- Co-Design with Stakeholders: Involve clients, clinicians, and staff in design discussions, host focus groups to gather lived experience
- Transparency and Feedback Loops: Share drafts of concepts with participants, clearly explain which suggestions can be integrated, and why some cannot (budget, code compliance, etc)
- Equity and Representation: Include voices from marginalized groups who are underrepresented in design decisions, ensure language access and culture responsiveness across the design process

3. Built Environment

- Flexibility in seating, lighting, and color tones
- Modality-specific room design
- Indoor and outdoor spaces within a confidential space
- Sensory support
- Gender inclusive spaces
- Sensory supports regardless of age

Floorplan Concept - Necessary Elements

Interior

- Variety of room shapes (typically with windows) to include treatment rooms with corners and without
- Separate spaces for clinical work, body-based therapeutic work, group work, and business work
- Designated space for employee wellness and decompression
- Designated space for admin staff to be available but non threatening in waiting area
- Well-lit waiting area with access to food, drink, and resources
- Gender inclusive restrooms
- Sensory soothing elements throughout
- Panic button for employees

Exterior

- Sensory soothing parking lot elements for pre/post session decompression
- Accessible ground for mobility devices
- Greenery present throughout
- Exterior garden space
- Mindfulness labyrinth
- Privacy fence for confidentiality
- Water elements
- Access to food and drink
- Flexibility both treatment and decompression



Example of space with *similar* elements
disregard any inpatient elements as they do not apply to outpatient work

TiD Domains in Practice

Safety

- Panic buttons for employees
- Access to multiple entrances/exits
- IC and Fee Transparency
- Screenings for clients, employees, and groups
- No sharp materials present
- Fall resistant fixtures
- Compliance is clearly posted throughout
- Well-lit areas
- Signage for changes in surfaces

Trustworthiness & Transparency

- Adherence to ethical standards
- 360 degree reviews for employees
- Private spaces for staff
- HIPAA Compliance on all parts of the property
- EHR is protected
- All files are behind 2 locked doors
- Clear signage is throughout spaces

Peer Support

- Mentorship programs among staff
- Paid consultation time
- Feedback is encouraged
- Open meeting spaces indoors and outdoors
- Multi-use spaces are open for all staff members and support/process group members
- ProQOL is administered monthly to all staff

Collaboration & Mutuality

- Opportunities for feedback from clients about treatment and experiences in the space
- Engaging in outside events with referral partners
- Group therapy spaces
- Group therapy and meeting spaces include options for participation

TiD Domains in Practice

Empowerment & Voice

- Revisiting treatment plans with clients
- Strengths-based language when giving feedback
- Giving all clients and employees space to offer feedback
- Outsourcing third-parties for critiques, reviews, and compliance
- Acknowledging power dynamics
- Spaces for self-care and decompression both indoors and outdoors

Choice

- Clients are involved with treatment planning and diagnostics as appropriate
- Clients are offered choice of space depending on modality and affect
- Clients are not “locked in” to a specific space and can move spaces if needed during session
- Flexible seating offered for staff and clients
- Variety of lighting, and moveable furniture

Equity

- Clinicians uphold all equity and inclusion elements of licensure compliance
- Staff attends equity trainings, paid for by practice
- Artwork in office shows representation without tokenization
- Office space acknowledges the land it is on
- Gender-neutral restrooms with space for child and adult changing tables

Community

- Engaging in community events
- Employees are of a diverse makeup
- Materials are ethically sourced, when possible
- Referrals for professional services fulfill blindspots
- Spaces are representative of the populations served
- A variety of food/drinks are provided that incapsulate various needs and cultures

TiD Domains in Practice

Comfort

- Navigating the space is intuitive, both with interior and exterior spaces
- Clear signage is present
- Spaces are flexible in nature and accommodate a range of body sizes and abilities
- Colors are soothing for high energy clients and invigorating for lower energy clients, all within a regulating palette
- White noise is present through in-ceiling units
- Water sounds are present in outdoor spaces

Movement

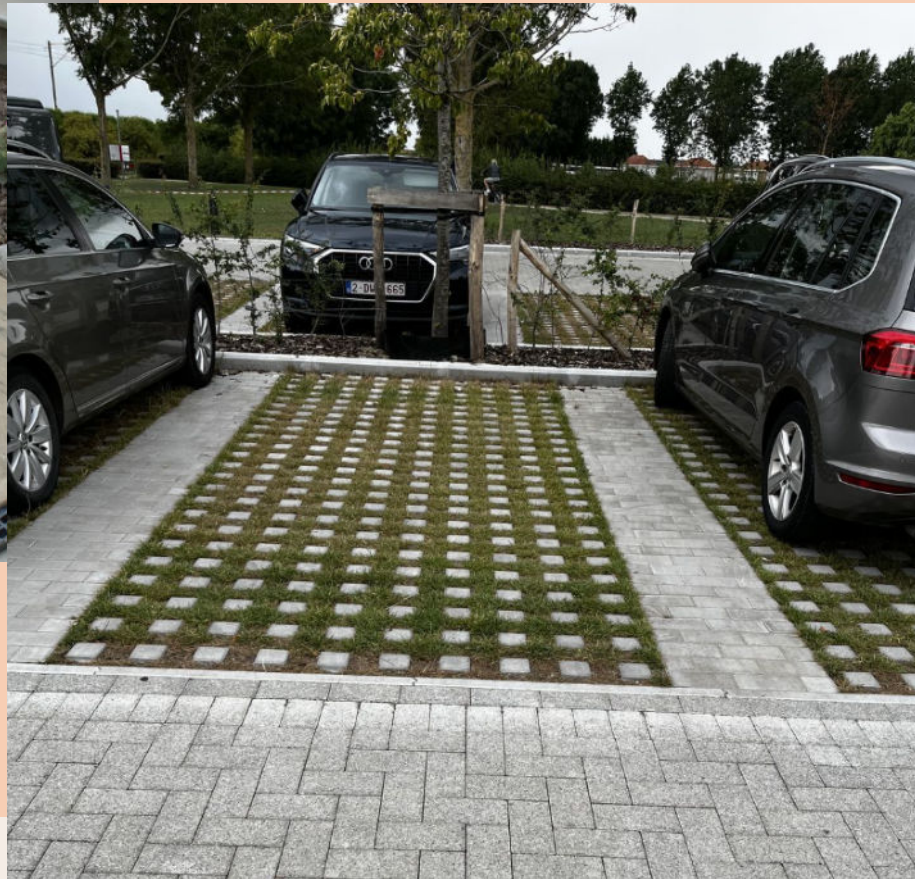
- Somatic space is available for clients, clinicians, and employees
- Labyrinth is available outdoors of body-based regulation
- Flexible seating allows for movement
- Outdoor flexible seating includes a hammock/swing
- A variety of manipulatives and toys are readily available in waiting room, treatment rooms, and employee rooms
- Sensory walls are in teen space + employee space

Play

- Manipulatives are available in all spaces including waiting room, employee spaces, treatment rooms, and exterior spaces
- Both clinical and nonclinical play materials are available
- Creative space includes a variety of expressive arts materials and music instruments

Visual Inspiration

Parking Lot & Transition Spaces



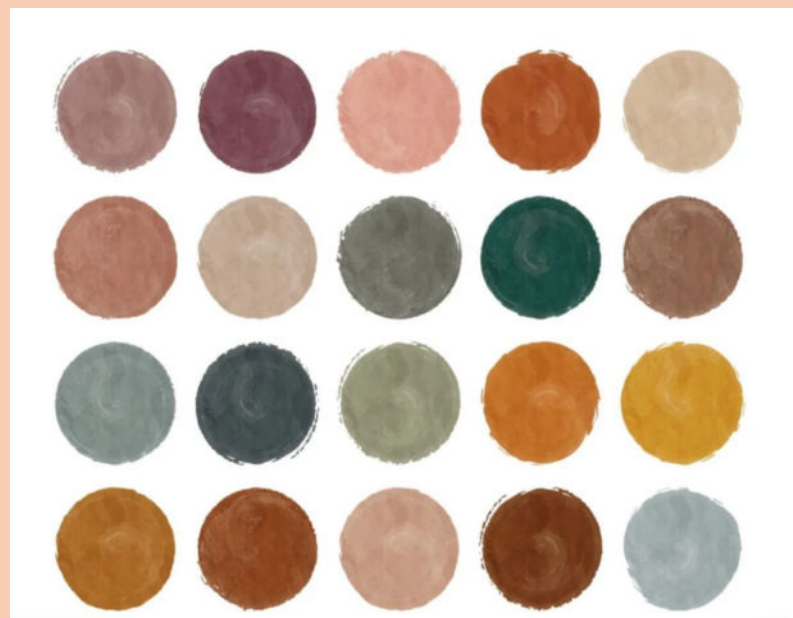
Key Inclusions: Accessibility in walkways, integration of nature and greenery, privacy, neutral tones, and safe lighting above parking spaces and walkways

Visual Inspiration

Practice-Wide Color Inspiration



Earth Tones for neutral spaces + therapy spaces with more focus on anxiety and PTSD, as well as employee spaces



Jewel tones for spaces catered towards anger work, parts work, children/teens, expression arts, and depression-focused work

Waiting Room



Key Inclusions: Flexible seating, neutral tones, access to food and drink, sensory inclusions for all ages

Visual Inspiration

Restrooms



Key Inclusions: Access to warm and cold water, spaces accessible to mobility aids, adult and child changing tables, resource bin, single stalls with locks, ambient lighting, panic/help button

Admin Spaces



Key Inclusions: Flexible seating, neutral tones, access to fresh air, live greenery, separation from clinical spaces

Visual Inspiration

Pediatric (Child + Teen) Spaces

Key Inclusions: Access to corners, flexible seating, stain resistance, games and toys (clinical and nonclinical), pillows and blankets, varied lighting, sensory regulating elements, access to snacks and drinks



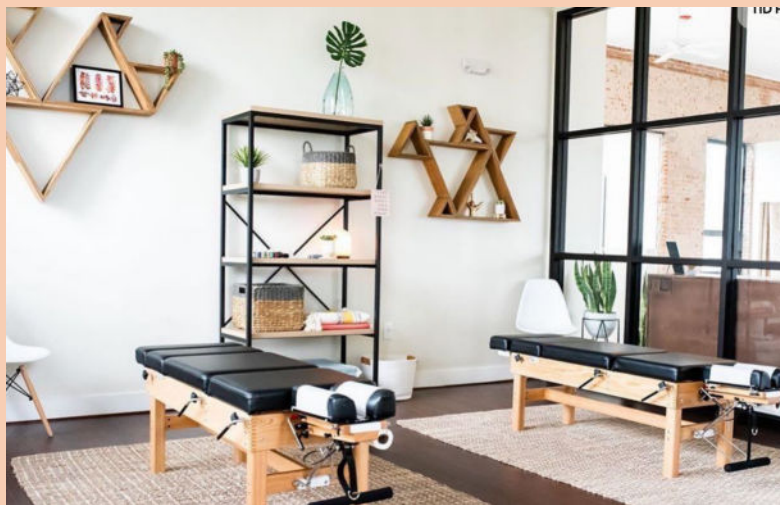
Expressive Arts Spaces



Key Inclusions: Flexible seating, group seating, appropriate for children and adults, invigorating tones, access to nature, art and music supplies, stain-resistant fixtures

Visual Inspiration

Somatic Spaces



Key Inclusions: Access to nature, drop tables, weights and resistance bands, meditation cushions, flexible seating choices, neutral tones, Health At Every Size artwork, neutral scented sanitation supplies, ambient lighting, close proximity to restrooms and snacks/drinks

Group Spaces



Key Inclusions: Flexible seating that can be moved, large group accessibility, access to fidgets and creative supplies, temperature control, weighted pillows, sour candy, panic button



Visual Inspiration

Adult Therapy



Depression-Based Modalities: Jewel tones, flexible seating, access to blankets and weighted pillows, expressive materials, ambient lighting, access to fresh air and nature, intentional visual anchors via artwork, tactile elements like velvet, woven materials, and natural wood

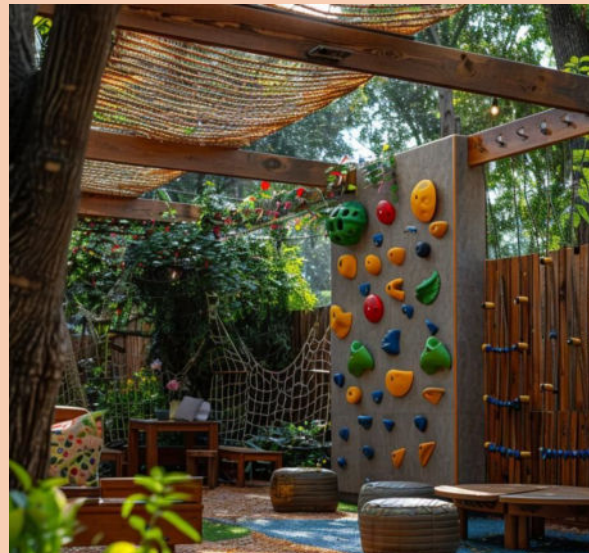


Anxiety-Based Modalities: Lighter neutral tones, more natural light, greenery and plants, expressive materials, nature-inspired artwork, temperature control, emphasis on rounded edges and soft upholstery



Visual Inspiration

Outdoor Spaces

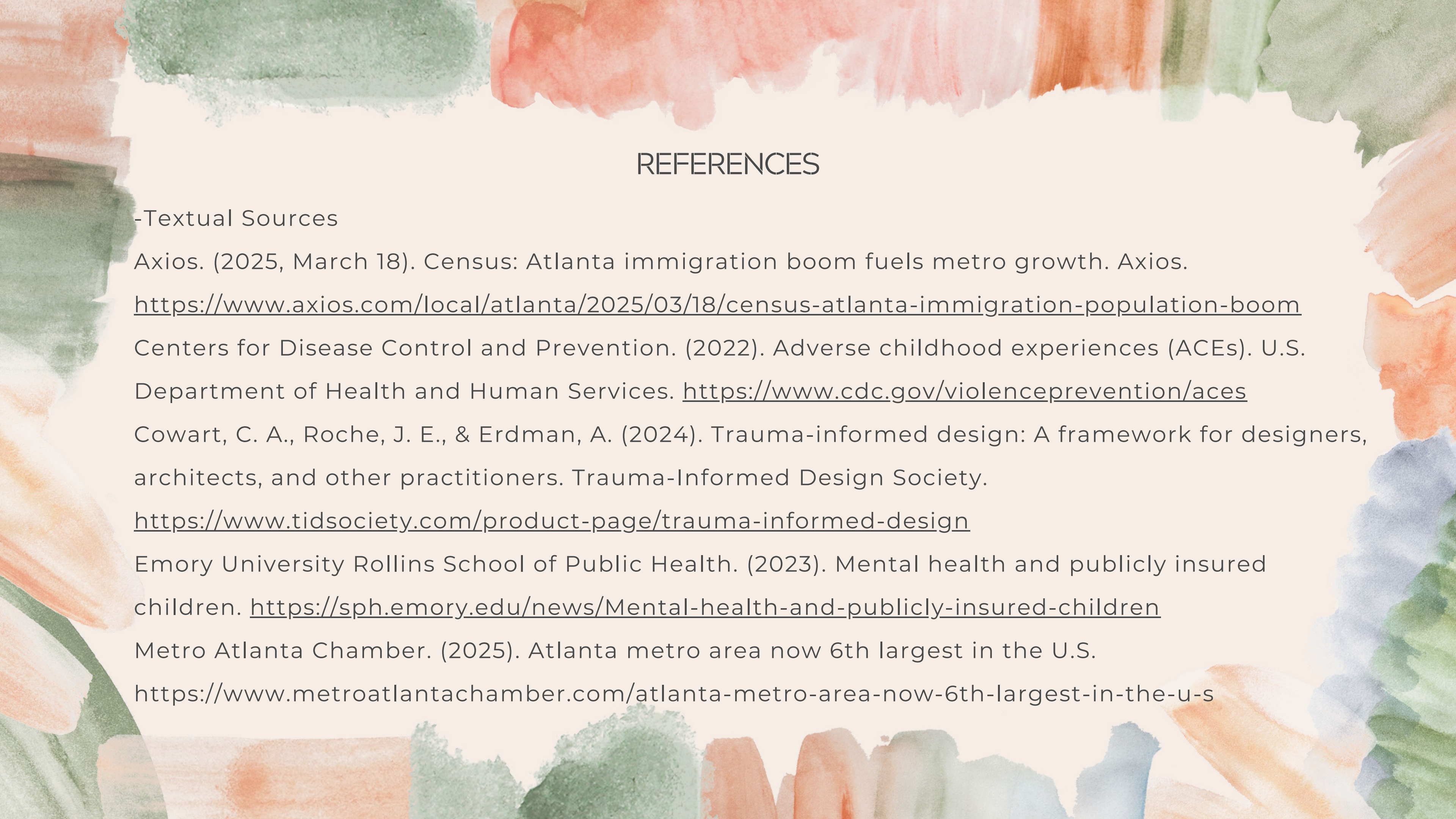


Key Inclusions: flexible seating, semi-private slat fence, outdoor labyrinth, group and individual seating, movement/play materials, access to water (fountains, ponds, etc), shade and direct sunlight exposure spaces

Employee Spaces

Key Inclusions: Group and individual seating, sensory regulation materials, community messaging board, neutral and light tones, access to food and water, collaboration spaces, no access to clinical spaces





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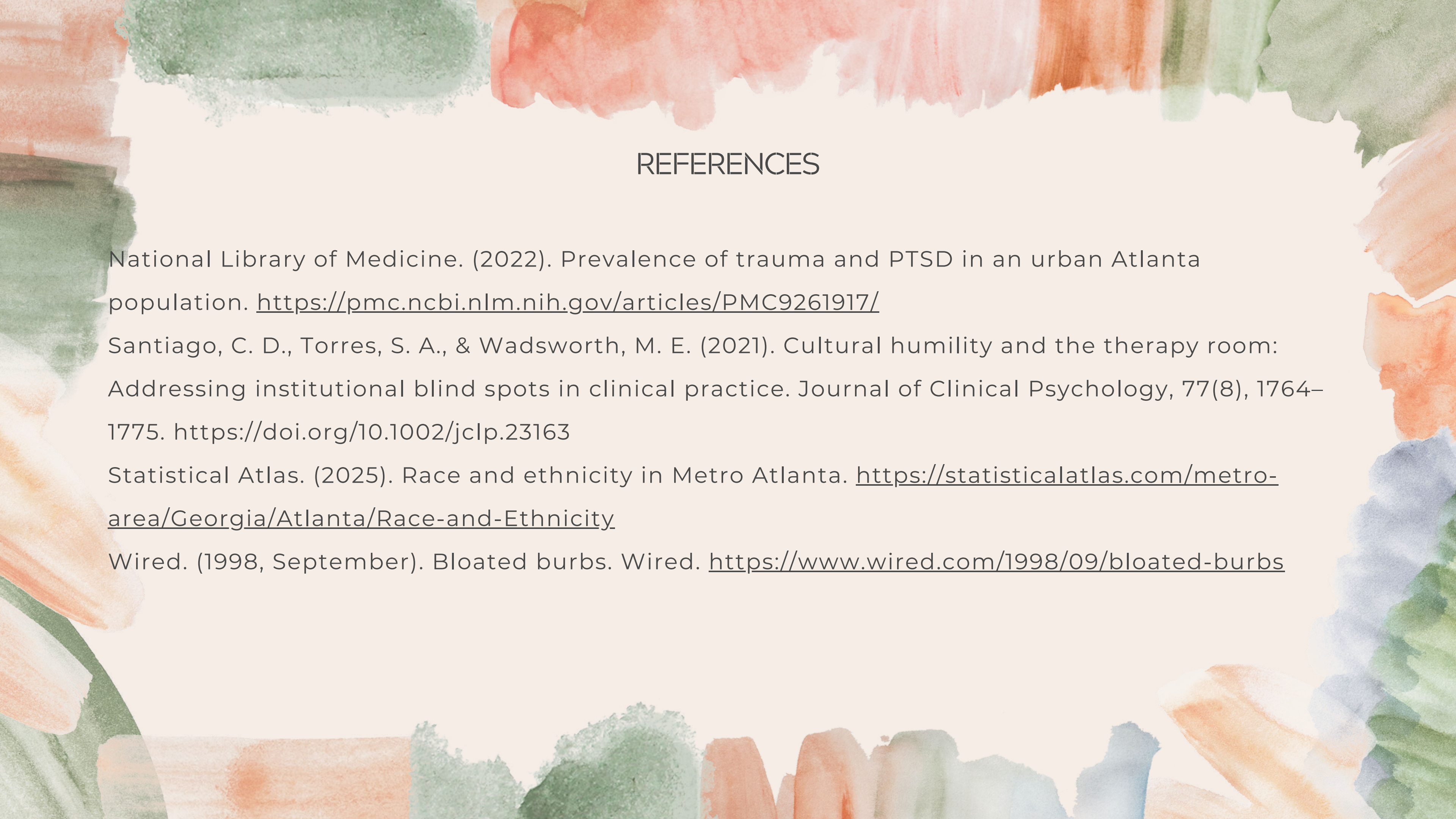
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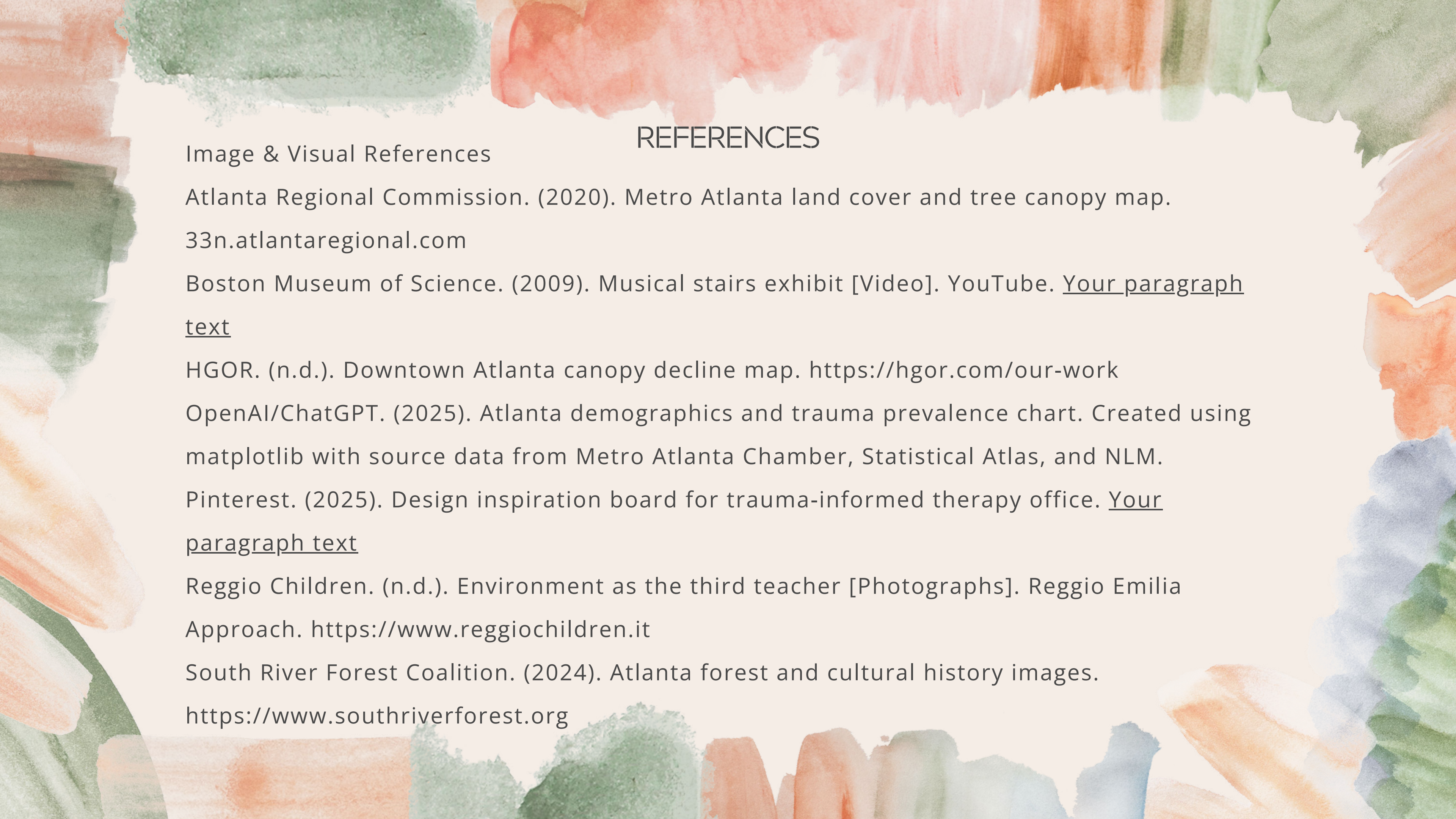
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