

The Impact of Trauma on Children in Child Welfare Systems

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Parking Lot

➤ What we bring to this topic.
Knowledge and case experience

➤ What we bring to this training.
Expectations and questions:



Defining Trauma

Defining trauma for service intervention

- **Event** that is considered threatening to the life or well being of self or others.
- **Experience** is individual and different for each person
- **Effects** are typically symptoms related to eating, sleeping, mood and behavior regulation as well as hyper-vigilance and event memory control.

Defining Trauma

Defining trauma for service intervention:
issues and concerns,

- Event- *necessary for diagnosis*
- Experience- *subjective and requires ability and trust to report*
- Effect- *symptoms not exclusive to trauma and subject to interpretation or meaning making*

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach
Prepared by SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative July 2014

How We See Things



Trauma in Children: Expanding the Definition

- The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual defines a traumatic event as one in which a person experiences, witnesses, or is confronted with actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to the physical integrity of oneself or other.
- Trauma is defined by the American Psychological Association as an emotional response to a terrible event such as an accident, rape or natural disaster.

Trauma in Children: Expanding the Definition

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network lists events linked to child trauma. These events can involve actual or threatened exposure of the child to death, severe injury, sexual abuse, and may include exposure to domestic violence, community violence, assault, severe bullying or harassment, natural or man-made disasters, such as fires, floods, and explosions, severe accidents, serious or terminal illness, or sudden homelessness.

Trauma in Children: Expanding the Definition

- The Child Witness to Violence Project at Boston University School of Medicine defines child trauma as events that activate high levels of fear for ones life or someone closely connected.
- According to Victor Carrion at Stamford University young children have a distorted and non permanent sense of life and death and porous boundaries between themselves and parents.
- Therefore the absence or unavailability of a parent or primary attachment figure is emotionally equivalent to life threatening.

The Impact of Trauma



Trauma or perceived danger causes the excretion of adrenalin and cortisol in amounts that cause brain damage and death in laboratory animals.

(Perry 2004)

The Stress Response

- Cortisol is a critical hormone in the stress response, both supporting the adaptation to stress and danger and also potentially damaging the brain, immune system and physical growth.
- Healthy development requires close regulation of the cortisol and adrenal systems

Cortisol & the The Prefrontal Cortex

- Assesses risk
- Modulates fear
- Allows "executive control" – or at least guidance – over more primitive brain structures
- Is critical to relational functioning, empathy, connecting
- Helps children and adults with
 - Focus
 - Memory and reason
 - Self-awareness, reflection, emotions, impulses

**Trauma:
Impact on Brain Development:
Too Much or Too Little Cortisol**

- Impulse Control
- Cause and Effect
- Predictability
- Emotional Regulation
- Reciprocal Engagement



**Trauma & Developmental Tasks
For Children and Youth**

- Baby Jimmy - Infancy: Wooing Other Back
 ⇨ Trust in Other ⇨ Attachment
- Isaiah - Toddlerhood : Testing the Strength
 of the Attachment ⇨ Trust in Self
 Autonomy

**Developmental Tasks
For Children and Youth**

- Carlitos-Pre-School : Testing the ⇨
 Boundaries of the Attachment
 Power and Differentiation
- Mister-School Age: Practicing the
 Attachment with Others ⇨Affiliation
 ⇨Role Boundaries

**Developmental Tasks
For Children and Youth**

- Pre-Adolescence: Examining Attachments
 ⇨ Meaning/Morality
- Adolescence: Challenging the Attachments
 with Risk Taking and Identity Formation
 ⇨ Self Awareness and Competence

**Behavioral Reactions in Children in
Response to Trauma**

- attachment needs disrupted
- increased separation anxiety
- disrupted sleep
- regressive behaviors
- changes in eating patterns
- insomnia, sleep disturbances
- excessive crying
- psychosomatic complaints (headaches,
 stomach aches)
- changes in toileting patterns



Behavioral Reactions in Children

- emotional and behavioral disturbances
 (withdrawal; low self-esteem; nightmares;
 aggression against peers, family members;
 distraction of property)
- changes in ability to learn (difficulty focusing,
 concentrating, easily distracted)
- difficulty establishing good peer relationships

Behavioral Reactions in Children

- overreaction to loud noises, sudden movements
- decreased attention span
- mistrust of adults
- fear of being hurt
- mood swings, acting out
- increase in aggressive behaviors toward others

Behavioral Reactions in Children

- suppressed drive to explore, natural curiosity
- increased anxiety levels, worry
- hyper vigilance and cue seeking

Triggers of old loss



Any loss can re traumatize a child or adult as can situations characterized by additional threats, triggers of old trauma or **simple uncertainty**

Attachment & Trauma

Film Clip: American Violet

The Adolescent Brain and Trauma

- Cortex still developing until mid-20's
- Not able to execute cause and effect thinking consistently – even without trauma
- Dopamine is helpful to increase judgment and impulse control; trauma disrupts dopamine
- Brain hemisphere integration is effected – rational thought vs. overwhelming emotion

AHGGGG or AHHHHH The Need for Dopamine



Seeking Equilibrium



The presence of parents or other adult attachment figures raises dopamine levels and lowers the dangerous levels of cortisol.

(Dozier, 2005)

Seeking Equilibrium

- **Dopamine seeking:** Drugs like cocaine, opium, heroin, and alcohol increase the levels of dopamine, as does nicotine.
- **Relationship seeking:** Any warm body will do?

Stress as Trauma

Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children's Learning and Development and change brain architecture.

Scientists now know that chronic, unrelenting stress in early childhood, caused by abrupt separation from caregivers, extreme poverty, or parental depression, for example, can be toxic to the developing brain in the same way as repeated abuse and witnessing violence changes brain architecture.

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. *In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. NGA, Center for Best Practices, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2008. www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

Tolerable Stress

Physiological responses large enough to disrupt brain architecture

Activated by:

- Threats or dangers with longer duration and/or lack of power to make changes that will diminish the threat
- Such as the death of a loved one, natural disasters, parental abandonment or perceived abandonment

Tolerable Stress

It is tolerable only when it is relieved by supportive relationships:



- that facilitate coping,
- restore heart rate and lower cortisol levels
- reduce child's sense of being overwhelmed

National Scientific Council on the Developing Brain, Harvard University

Toxic Stress

Strong & prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of buffering protection of adult support

Activated by:

- Recurrent abuse, neglect, care-giver depression, substance abuse, family violence or triggers for tolerable stress that are prolonged and without supports
- Increased susceptibility to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes and mental health problems

Stress, Attachment and Trauma

Children's capacity to adequately cope with trauma/stress depends largely on the nature of the stressor and on the attachment figure's capacity to diminish or counter the effects linked to the stressor (Lyons-Ruth et al., 1999).



The Stress Response

- Research has shown that contact with available and supportive caregivers regulates cortisol production and that securely attached infants buffer the cortisol response to stress (Bernard and Dozier, 2010)
- Children who are temperamentally more fearful may experience new situations as more fearful and thus increase their cortisol production- a secure emotional relationship may buffer this response

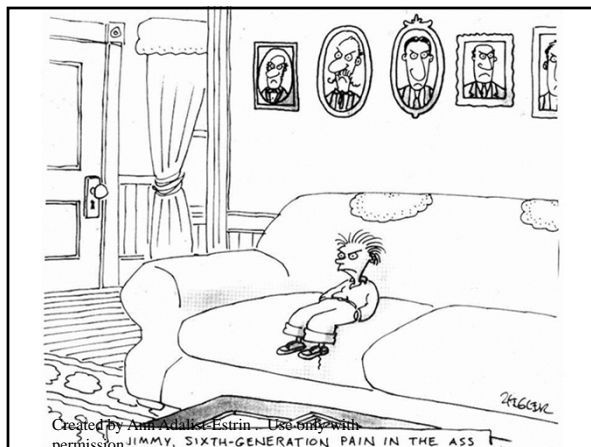
Thomas and Chess' 9 Traits of Temperament

1. Sensitivity
2. Regularity
3. Activity Level
4. Intensity
5. Approach/Withdrawal
6. Adaptability
7. Persistence and Attention Span
8. Distractibility
9. Mood



Temperament and Children in Child Welfare

- The temperament qualities themselves can help parents and workers to know children
- Looking at constellations of temperament characteristics can aid in predicting how children will respond to parental incarceration, removal or foster care and sometimes predict resilience.
- The meaning that is made of a child's behavior and temperament by each family member or other adult, shapes their response to the child significantly and often "links" them to the parent or the caregiver in both positive and negative ways.



Created by Ann Adalister Estrin - Use only with permission JIMMY, SIXTH-GENERATION PAIN IN THE ASS

Reactions to Traumatic Stress

- Carrion also found that guilt over behaviors the child performed or failed to perform during the event or to prevent it, was highly associated with PTSD symptom severity.
- His findings also suggest that changes in attachment behaviors were also significantly related to PTSD symptoms in children.

Reactions to Traumatic Stress: When the Caregiver is Traumatized

- Children of traumatized parents were found to evidence more anxious depression, withdrawn depression, social problems, symptoms of PTSD and internalization problems.
- The parent's attachment style was not found to have a significant impact on the manifestation of child behavior problems
- More recent trauma was associated with more behavior problems in children.
- Dole,T.R. "Intergenerational transmission of trauma in African immigrants" (January 1, 2011).

In Other Words...

Children will seek to raise their Dopamine levels but their temperament and attachment patterns as well as their parents abilities may get in the way.



Reactions to Attachment Disruptions/Separation Trauma

Children and adults can present on a continuum of attachment disruption but typically fall in one of two categories of relationship behaviors over time.

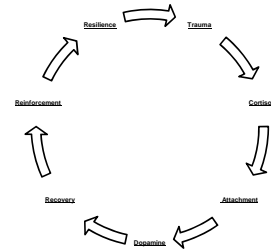
Any warm body will do



Letting No One In



The Positive Cycle

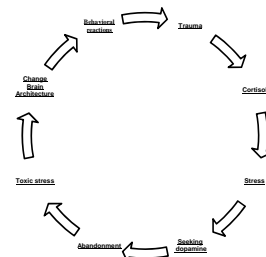


Long Term Reactions to Traumatic Stress

Behaviors that were protective during or in the immediate aftermath of stress, attachment disturbance and trauma can be maladaptive over time.



The Negative Cycle



Long Term Reactions

ACE Study: Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

The ACE Study is an ongoing collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente. Led by Co-principal Investigators Robert F. Anda, MD, and Vincent J. Felitti, MD. The ACE Study is perhaps the largest scientific research study of its kind, analyzing the relationship between multiple categories of childhood trauma (ACEs), and health and behavioral outcomes later in life.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Growing up experiencing any of the following conditions in the household prior to age 18:

- Recurrent physical or emotional abuse or neglect
- Sexual abuse
- An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
- An incarcerated household member
- Someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal
- Mother is treated violently
- One or no parents

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Matching adverse childhood experiences to adult health status:

- Adverse childhood experiences are common, although they are typically concealed and unrecognized
- They still have a profound effect 50 years later although they have evolved from psychosocial experience to organic disease and mental illness
- ACEs are main determinant of US health & social well-being
- Most of the ACEs cause trauma.

How we know what we know

Meaning Making

The ACE Study through a lens of child maltreatment vs. adult risk factors

"So when we talk about a child separated from a parent due to incarceration and we are interpreting the ACEs literature only through a child maltreatment lens, the meaning that gets made (intentionally or not) is that children of incarcerated parents are maltreated children, harmed by their parents and thus better off without them. If however, the parents who are in prison or jail are seen as potential supports for these children, as buffers from the toxicity of the stress, then a different meaning is made of the loss. It becomes more profound and less dismissible."

Adalist-Estrin, A. White House Remarks 2014

Created by Ann Adalist-

The Effects

Behavioral

- Internalizing: Withdrawal, eating disorders cutting
- Physical aggression or self destruction
- Acting out inappropriately/ disruptive behavior
- Anti-social behavior (conduct disorder)
- Violent or serious delinquent behavior



These behaviors are often expressions of feelings and/or symptoms of distress but responded to ineffectively or inappropriately.

Let's talk about the meaning that is made of the behaviors by foster parents, case workers and the court.

The Effects

Mental Health

- Separation anxiety
- Attachment "disruptions"
- Depression
- Eating and sleeping disorders
- Anxiety and hyper arousal, attention disorders, and developmental regression
- Trauma (post-traumatic stress responses)



These issues often go undiagnosed, misdiagnosed or poorly treated especially in low income children of color.

Let's talk about mental health consultants and experts.

The Effects

“Acute care” forms of child and adolescent mental health services are poorly matched to the service needs of a disadvantaged child population presenting with complex attachment- trauma-related symptoms.

(Leslie, Kelleher, Burns, Landsverk, & Rolls, 2003).

Diagnosis and Treatment

- In adults, depression, anxiety and/or substance abuse are typically present with PTSD.
- In children , separation anxiety, and ADHD are presenting symptoms after trauma.
- In both, the secondary conditions are typically seen as the primary diagnosis.
- PTSD is often ignored in children unless there is a readily identifiable traumatic event.
- Attachment disturbances and separation trauma are rarely diagnosed or treated.

Michael Scheeringa, Tulane University

The Effects

Educational

- Attention Difficulties
- Learning Disabilities
- Diminished academic performance
- Behavior Problems
- Truancy



There are often emotional and behavioral influences on the learning process, Again, what meaning is made by everyone?

Resiliency

“ Risk factors are not predictive factors because of protective factors.”



David Satcher, M.D.
Former U.S. Surgeon General

Protective Factors

- Primary Attachments-helping parents
- Other adult bonds-training in systems
- Skills-confidence and competence-TFCBT and Karate???
- Faith/Meaning- But whose meaning?
- Empowerment- giving children a say



SAMHSA's 3 R's Trauma Informed Approach for Systems and Services

- **Realize** the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery;
- **Recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- **Respond** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
- **Resist Re-traumatization.**

SAMHSA's Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice and choice
- Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

What we take from this session

- **Think of something you heard today that “pats you on the back”**
- **Think of something you heard today that makes you want to google.**
- **Think of something you heard today that makes you want to argue.**
- **Think of something you heard today that makes you eager to try.**
- **Think of something you heard today that makes you want to text someone.**

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