

What is traumatic stress?

- Traumatic stress refers to the physical and emotional responses of an individual to the events that threaten the life or physical integrity of the individual or of someone critically important to them (parent, sibling, spouse)
- Traumatic events overwhelm an individual's ability to cope and elicit feelings of terror, powerlessness, and out-of-control physiological arousal

Marsenich, L. 2010, CA Institute of Mental Health

Definitions

- “Prolonged exposure to repetitive or severe events such as child abuse, is likely to cause the most severe and lasting effects. Traumatization can also occur from neglect, which is the absence of essential physical or emotional care, soothing and restorative experiences from significant others, particularly in children.”

- International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation

Definitions

- Interpersonal violence tends to be more traumatic than natural disasters because it is more disruptive to our fundamental sense of trust and attachment, and is typically experienced as intentional rather than as “an accident of nature” (Breslau et al., 1999; Darves-Bornoz et al., 1998; Holbrook, Hoyt, Stein, & Sieber, 2001) .

Prevalence

- Trauma histories are pervasive among youth in our culture (especially youth from diverse cultural backgrounds).
- The majority of clients served by public mental health and substance abuse service systems are survivors of trauma (Mueser et al, 1998).

Prevalence

- Within the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems, 80% of females are survivors of physical and sexual abuse.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of women and men in treatment for substance abuse report trauma histories (SAMSHA/CSAT, 2000).

Impact of Trauma

- Activation of survival responses:
 - Fight
 - Flight
 - Freeze
 - Submit
- Shutting down of non-essential tasks.
- Rational thought is less possible at this time.

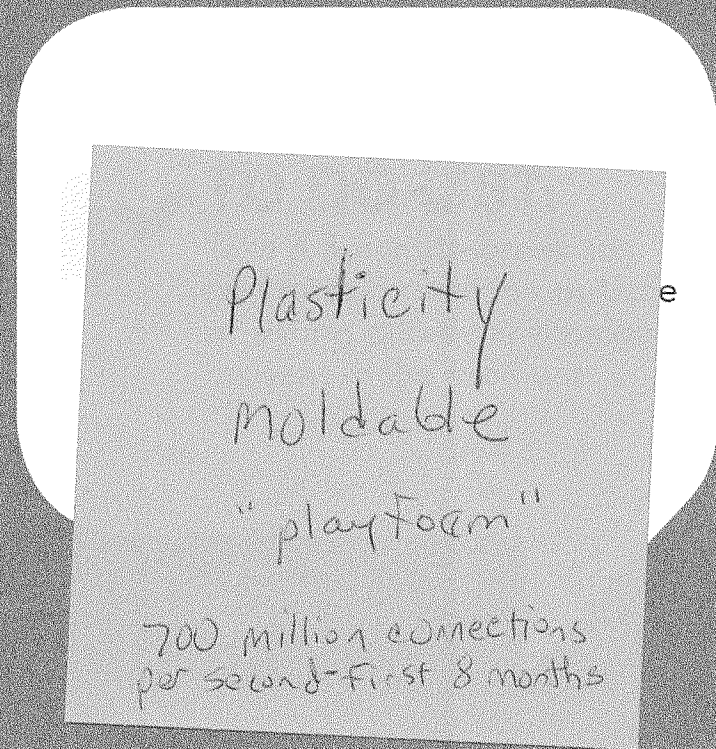
Impact of Trauma

Prolonged exposure to trauma and/or repetitive traumatic events MAY:

- Cause an individual's natural alarm system to no longer function as it should.
- Create emotional and physical responses to stress.
- Result in emotional numbing and psychological avoidance.
- Affect an individual's sense of safety.
- Diminish an individual's capacity to trust others.

How the Brain Works

- Lots of different relationships help our brains to thrive in good times and get through tough times
- Our childhood brain is the foundation of our adult brain
- Stress can affect the architecture of our brain



We need to feel safe to think and learn,
but stress can push us DOWNSTAIRS in our brain...

Relationships,
Setting priorities

Reading,
Speech,
Regulating
emotions

**UPSTAIRS:
THINKING & LEARNING BRAIN**

Trouble focusing at school or work

Say or do things impulsively

Lose temper easily

Can't get along with others

DOWNSTAIRS: SURVIVAL BRAIN

Trauma Symptoms/ Responses

- **Avoidance of trauma reminders**
- **Re-experiencing**
- **Hyperarousal**
- **Trauma-related, sexualized, aggressive, or oppositional behaviors**
- **Dissociation**
- **Unsafe behaviors**

Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger (2006). *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents*.

Relationship Problems

- Difficulties getting along with others/peers
- Poor problem-solving or social skills
- Hypersensitivity in interpersonal interactions
- Maladaptive strategies for making friends
- Impaired interpersonal trust
- Intimacy issues

Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger (2006). *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents*.

Cognitive Problems

Maladaptive patterns of thinking about self, others, and situations

- **distortions or inaccurate thoughts**
 - **self-blame for traumatic events**
- **unhelpful thoughts**
 - **dwelling on the worst possibilities**

Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger (2006). Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents.

Affective Problems

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Anger
- Poor ability to tolerate or regulate negative affective states
- Inability to self-soothe
- Lability

Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger (2006). Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents.

Family Problems

- Parenting skill deficits
- Poor parent-child communication
- Disturbances in parent-child bonding
- Disruption in family function/ relationships due to familial abuse or violence
- Intergenerational abuse/neglect

Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger (2006). Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents

Somatic Problems

- Sleep difficulties
- Triggers - physiological hyperarousal and hypervigilance toward possible trauma cues
- Physical tension
- Somatic symptoms can include
 - Headaches
 - Body aches
 - Fatigue
 - Stomachaches
- There is emerging evidence for changes in adrenal and immune functioning

Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger (2006). Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents.