

Understanding the Biological Repercussions of Trauma

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Creating Trauma Sensitive Communities

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Facts

- 1 in 4 Children will experience a traumatic event before age 16!
- Trauma Reactions interfere with learning.
- A traumatic event for one person may not be traumatic for another person – be individually sensitive to each person's reaction to any event!
- You do not need to know the cause of the trauma or even if there is a trauma. The person's BEHAVIOR will tell you of a trauma reaction!

Typical Events that Cause Trauma

- Child Abuse and/or Neglect,
- Sexual Abuse
- Bullying - occurring at home or school
- Domestic and Community Violence
- Homelessness
- Traumatic Loss –death - even loss of a best friend
- Medical Trauma – in child or parent
- Handicaps that feel traumatizing to an individual
- Rejection from others when it is consistent and confusing
- Natural Disasters, Terrorism, War
- Personal events that “feel” traumatic (divorce etc.)

Physical and Behavioral Signs of Trauma Reactions

- Over Reactions of any kind!
- Hyper-Vigilance (often looks “nosey”)
- Extremely manipulative (feels controlling)
- Misreading, or missing, social cues
- Cause and Effect does not compute
- Jumping if someone moves quickly near them
- Constantly miss/don't get the directions
- Anticipate a negative.... miss positives
- Difficulty verbalizing their needs and/or feelings
- Acting helpless or younger than their age

Trauma is BIOLOGICAL not just behavioral



- Trauma affects the lens through which a person views the world – everything processes differently after a trauma event.



Trauma Triggers FEAR

- Fear stimulates the self-protective lower brain there is no choice, it is automatic/biological
- Survival instincts over-ride learning
- A person in survival mode must watch for danger from any source-even if they are safe
- Punishment increases fear and adds to stress
- Learning new “non-survival information” is just not relevant when you are in stress mode.

What is a helper to do???

- The person does not care how much you know until they know how much you care!
- Build Relationship!!!!!!
- A person who feels understood can work towards feeling safer and more capable.
- Be aware of the hierarchy of needs, we cannot learn until we feel safe and understood or fed!
- Calm the stressed person – do not stimulate them. The issue at hand can wait until the person is calm.
- Control battles are destructive –relationship comes first before any other issue!

Control Battles

- Helpers can maintain control without the battles that stressed people try to start.
- Helpers must be aware that defiance or disrespect is the person's response to stress. It is not personal even though it is unacceptable...
- Respect for the person no matter what!
- Self-Regulation is a requirement for all helpers all the time – no personal outbursts! Be aware of your own wounds and work to heal them on your own time. Ask for help when you need to!!!



Team Work

- Connecting Parents, School Staff Members, Neighbors, and Therapists will help the person to feel surrounded by friends in his/her time of need. This is the best chance to improve the person's security so that school is a safe place to learn, home is a safe place to live. Stressors that cannot be changed will be soothed. Even in the worst of times, having supportive friends close by can help the person get through the day