

# A Trauma-informed Approach to Working with Children

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## INTRODUCTION

Meet your trainer

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## Objectives

- Participants will:
  - Understand the basics of the effects of trauma
  - Discuss victimization dynamics
  - Identify ways to interact with children in a sensitive manner
  - Explain how trauma and child development affects a child's ability to provide information
  - Learn how to best obtain information from a child.

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## Trauma, Child Development, and Crisis Reaction

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## Understanding Trauma

Highly Intense Environment Activation (Episode)	Low Intensity, High Frequency (Environment Activation)	Low Intensity, High Frequency (Environment Activation)
Natural Disasters Physical Abuse Sexual Abuse DV Neglect Witnessing Crime Victim of Crime Military Actions Accidents/Injuries	Chaotic Environments Aggressive Environments Punitive Environments Inconsistent Parenting Instability in the family (financial, emotional, etc.)	Chaotic Environments Aggressive Environments Punitive Environments Inconsistent Parenting Instability in the family (financial, emotional, etc.)

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## Influencing Variables in Trauma

- Severity of incident
- Meaning of incident to this victim at this time in his/her circumstances
- Previous experience and development of coping mechanisms
- Support system available for victim
- Stability of mental health prior to crime

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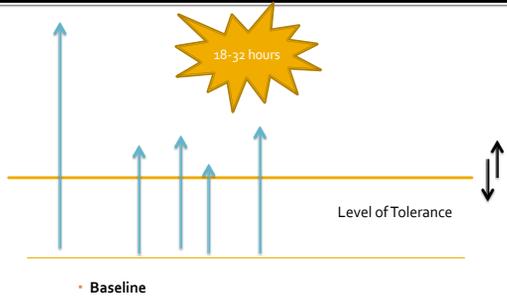
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## Level of Tolerance



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## The Hand Model of the Brain

- Brain Stem: The things we do that we do not have to think about.
- Emotion Center (Limbic System)
  - Smoke Detector (Amygdala)
- Thinking Brain (Neocortex): Thought and planning, relationships

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## Three Levels of Safety

### Three Levels of Safety

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## Tonic Immobility

- Extreme fear with close proximity to the threat
- Memories stored as sensory information versus contextual
- Physiological response
  - Dramatic decrease in heart rate
  - Lack of muscle control
  - Vocal chords frozen
  - Lack of feeling body sensations

Marx, Forsyth, Gallop & Fuxe (2008)

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## Ever Burned your hand on the stove?



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## 100% Reactive

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## Discussion

What emotions or behaviors would you expect to see in a child that may have been harmed?

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## Signs????

- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Shame
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Confusion



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## Signs???

- Laughing
- Smiling
- Joking
- Calm
- Acceptance



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## Victimization Signs



- People respond differently and signs of victimization vary.
- Some show no outward signs
- Some display dramatic changes to daily functioning

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## How Do You Talk to A Child

- Know:
  - How trauma/fear impacts memory
  - How to determine a child’s development
  - How to establish rapport with children
  - How to communicate with children on their level
- Be patient,
- Remain calm,
- Be Supportive

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## “Assessment” of Child Development

- Factors to consider: age, **language**, culture, verbal skills, social skills, gender, disabilities.
- Assess through observation, interaction and experience with other children.
- Tuning in:
  - ▶ Possible cultural, physical or other barriers
  - ▶ Is the child’s response appropriate ( who, where)
  - ▶ Is the child capable of providing information
  - ▶ If so, to what extent

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## Language and Comprehension



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## Language and Comprehension

- Language:
  - is a process throughout childhood (mimicking to comprehension of meaning)
  - Can be family specific
- Source Monitoring
- Under stress, abilities may regress

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## Ages 2 to 4

- Easily distracted
- Use the child's name frequently
- Ask one question at a time
- Use short sentences
- Child has a short attention span
- Interview close to the event



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## Ages 5 to 8

- Child will interpret questions literally
- Make questions as short as possible
- Inquire about one idea at a time.

*Rapid fire questioning often used as an interdiction technique will not be effective with child victims.*



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## Ages 9 to 11

- Thinking is logical
- Understands sense of time
- Communicates



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## Ages 12 to 15

- Thinking is logical
- Thinking involves planning and forethought
- Understands a sense of time
- Will give information in narrative form.



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## Understanding Victimization

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## Why Adolescents are at Risk

- Normal Developmental factors
  - Separation and individuation
  - Sexual desire
  - Curiosity
- Struggle with self-image and vulnerable to special attention/flattery
- Peer Pressure
- Attraction to risk taking
- Runaways or neglectful supervision

Martha Finnegan, *Working with Teens*, 2003

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## Unmet needs

- No sense of physical safety
- No sense of basic needs met
- Not feeling cared for
- No sense of belonging
- No power or influence in environment
- No fun or pleasure
- Not feeling worthwhile/loveable
- No sense of security
- No sense of meaning

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## The Three B's

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## Other Possible Risk Factors

- Prior abuse or neglect
- Multiple or casual caregivers
- Chaotic household
- Sexual Orientation
- Early sexualization
- Mental Health Issues
- Disabilities or developmental delays
- Juvenile history

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## Signs of Exploitation

- Stopped going to school
  - Sudden changes in appearance (nails, hair, clothes)
  - Access to cash (paying for friends' way)
  - Child seems to have a set "script"
  - Has an older "boyfriend"
- You may not have knowledge of these red flags until you speak to family or collaterals***

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## Grooming

- An offender prepares a child victim for the abuse.
- A process that can escalate over time.
- An offender often "tests the waters" and proceeds depending on victim response.
- Identifies and exploits an unmet need.

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## How Perpetrators Control Victims

Grooming =manipulation= method of control

- Establish trust with child and/or family
- Manipulate access
- Threats (physical or emotional)
- Plays on guilt/shame
- Desensitization
- Trauma bonding

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Often children appear to cooperate in their own victimization to some degree.

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## *“Cooperation”*

- Going along with the sexual contact in order to receive other benefits/gifts or avoid a consequence
- Victim may acquiesce or accommodate due to obedience, instinct, learned behavior
- Active participation in a relationship that is not perceived as victimization. Child does not recognize the power differential

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