Complex Trauma

And

Developmental Trauma Disorder
Danger

- How do children cope with danger?

  - High degree of dependency on caregivers for protective shield.

  - Attempts to protect self and others with awareness of helplessness and/or competencies
The Cliff
The absence of a protective shield results in a state of ineffectiveness and helplessness and a derailing of social emotional development and attachment formation.
What is Complex Trauma?

The term Complex trauma (or Developmental Trauma Disorder) describes exposure to chronic (repeated) trauma and the impact of such exposure (traumatic stress) on the child.

- Children who experienced complex trauma have endured multiple interpersonal traumatic events from a very young age
- The trauma was usually caused by adults who should have been caring for and protecting the child

Complex Trauma Outcomes

- Symptoms extend beyond PTSD (avoidance, re-experiencing, hyperarousal) in range and endurance of impacts.

- Risk of revictimization and impact of cumulative trauma

- Multiple domains of functioning affected
Domains Impacted by Complex Trauma

- Attachment
- Biology
- Affect Regulation
- Dissociation
- Behavioral Control
- Cognition
- Self Concept
Example: PTSD and Children: An Imperfect Fit

- The diagnosis of PTSD was based on research with adult war veterans and victims of rape.

- It focuses mostly on the effects of single event traumas.

- It does not take into consideration how children’s developmental stage may affect symptoms.
PTSD and Children: An Imperfect Fit

- It does not take into account how trauma can affect a child’s development afterward.
- The diagnosis requires that someone experience nearly all the symptoms and some children only have some.
- SO . . . even though many traumatized children show signs of PTSD, few meet the full diagnostic criteria.
Developmental Trauma Disorder

- Developmentally adverse interpersonal trauma for over one year, and exposure was before the age of 18.

- Subjective experiencing of:
  - Rage
  - Betrayal
  - Shame
  - Humiliation
Affective or Physiological Dysregulation

- Impaired developmental achievement related to arousal regulation:
  - Mood
  - Bodily Functions
  - Diminished awareness of emotional and behavioral states
  - Difficulty describing emotional or bodily states
• Attentional and Behavioral Dysregulation confused for ADHD

• Self and Relational Dysregulation attachment

• Some PTSD Symptoms
Triggered pattern of dysregulation in response to trauma cues
**Fight/Flight/Freeze**

- Overdevelopment of regions of the brain involved in anxiety and fear responses
- Underdevelopment of regions of the brain involved in complex thought and those necessary for learning.
Memory

Normally coordinated and cohesive

Explicit Memory
Left Brain
- Facts
- Details
- Who, What, When, Where and How
- Tied to language

Implicit Memory
Right Brain
- Emotional Memory
- Senses – smells, sounds etc
- Tied to fight/flight/freeze response

NCTSN
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Memory and Traumatic Stress

Trauma Uncouples Integration of Memory

I feel a certain way but don’t know why!!?
Cause and Effect
Functional Impairment

- Scholastic
- Familial
- Peer
- Legal
- Vocational
If you don’t ask, they won’t tell.
Trauma = chaos,
Structure = healing
It is the child’s experience of the event, not the event itself, that is traumatizing.
If we don’t look for or acknowledge trauma in the lives of children and adolescents, we end up chasing behaviors and limiting the possibilities for change.
The behavioral and emotional adaptations that maltreated children make in order to survive are brilliant, creative solutions, and are personally costly.