Reaching and Teaching Children Exposed to Trauma

Do You Know this Child?

- Wanders around the room
- Unable to maintain focused attention
- Aggressive toward other children
- Uses foul and aggressive language
- Lacks empathy
- Language delay
- Extremely withdrawn
- Avoids eye contact
- Refuses to accept comfort; prefers things over people

What is Trauma?

Definitions

- Trauma is defined as “any event that undermines a child’s sense of physical or emotional safety or poses a threat to the safety of the child’s parents or caregivers (Groves, 2002).

- Acute trauma is defined as a single exposure to an overwhelming event such as a tornado, flood or car accident.

- Complex trauma is defined by Bessel van der Kolk (2005) as “the experiences of multiple, chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature…and early life exposure.” According to this definition, there are a wide variety of events in a child’s

Types of Trauma

<table>
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<th>Abuse</th>
<th>Neglect</th>
<th>Sexual Abuse</th>
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<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Difficult Pregnancy</td>
<td>Difficult Birth</td>
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<td>Prenatal exposure</td>
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<td>Incarceration</td>
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<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>Premature birth</td>
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Trauma results in multisystem failure!

Systems that are affected by trauma are as follows:

Brain Development

- Smaller brain
- Less connectivity
- Less communication between hemispheres
- Smaller hippocampus
- Under developed prefrontal cortex
- High levels of cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine

Attachment

- Relationships are not safe
- The world is not a safe place where I can depend on others to meet my needs
- Internal working model of self as one who is basically flawed and worthy of love and care
- Deep core of shame
- May prefer things over people

Self-Regulation

- Has little to no awareness of an inner life
- Inability to identify emotions
- Inability to appropriately manage strong emotions
• Prone to meltdowns, temper tantrums, sudden emotional outbursts

• Inability to modulate behavior

• Uses behavior instead of words to get their needs

• Inability to delay gratification

• Inability for focused attention

**Learning Ability**

• Language delay

• Short term memory compromised

• IQ may be compromised

• Processes information more slowly

• Delay with symbolic representation which in turn, compromises literacy development

• Difficulty sequencing information

• Difficulty understanding past and future

• Inflexible thinking; rigid; difficulty with transitions

• Difficulty with cause and effect reasoning

**Social Skills**

• Empathy is compromised

• Turn taking and sharing is difficult

• Theory of mind is compromised

• Inability to play
Sensory Processing

- Most have sensory issues of some sort: vestibular, proprioceptive, tactile or interoceptive

- Behavioral challenges often related to sensory issues

- Will crave certain types of movement