INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA
AGENDA

- Definition
- Symptoms
- Impact
- Brain Development and Functioning
WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Traumatic Event

- A person experiences, witnesses or is confronted with actual or threatened death or serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others
- Often includes a response of intense fear, helplessness or horror
- Can result from private or public experiences

APA - DSM-IV
Developing Definition of Trauma

- **Event**
  - Actual or extreme threat of physical or psychological harm or the withholding of material or relational resources essential to healthy development. It can be a single event or repeated events.

- **Experience**
  - How the person assigns labels or meaning to the event, depends on the perception of the individual.

- **Effects**
  - Result of the person’s experience of the event. This can include neurological, physical, emotional or cognitive effects.

*Working definition – SAMHSA, Trauma and Justice*
What We Know

- Trauma occurs when external events overwhelm a person’s coping responses

- Severe and/or chronic trauma can have lasting adverse effects on physical, psychological, and social well-being

- Trauma is prevalent, at least 50% in general population have at least one traumatic event; more than 25% have two or more. In the human service field the majority of the population served have a trauma history
What We Know

- Trauma can result from adverse childhood experiences, natural disasters, accidents, interpersonal violence.

- Early, severe and/or chronic trauma can affect the brain which can result in behaviors and emotions that appear maladaptive.

- Correlated with poor health and social outcomes.
Chronic Trauma

- Chronic trauma refers to the experience of multiple traumatic events. These multiple events may be varied, such as a person who is exposed to domestic violence, involved in a serious car accident, and then becomes a victim of community violence.

- Chronic trauma may refer to longstanding physical abuse, neglect.

- Chronic trauma represents cumulative effects. Each new event reminds the individual of prior trauma.
Symptoms Associated with Trauma

Affect Dysregulation
Attention/Concentration
Negative Self-Image
Impulse Control
Aggression/Risk-taking
Overdependence/Clinginess
ODD/Conduct Dx
Sexual Problems
Attachment Problems
Substance Abuse
Impact of Trauma

Strong and prolonged activation of the body's stress management systems in the absence of the buffering protection of adult support increasing the risk of stress-related physical and mental illness
When the stimulation comes from chronic trauma, it strengthens the brain’s connections to the trauma emotional response.

Early and repeated childhood trauma can be associated with reduced size of the brain cortex.
- Cortex regulates memory, attention, perceptual awareness, thinking, language and consciousness.
- Impacts ability to regulate emotions.
Developmental Response To Trauma

The meaning of a traumatic event is based on the individual’s stage of neurological, cognitive and emotional development.
Early Childhood Trauma

- Traumatic events have a profound sensory impact on young children
- Lack of understanding of cause and effect/interpretation of events
- May blame parents/caregivers for not preventing frightening events
- Parent/child shared trauma impacts ability to parent
Early Childhood Trauma

- Rapid development of brains making them more vulnerable
- Less able to anticipate danger or how to keep themselves safe
- Lack of control over events/environments
- Cannot always express their feelings in words
Caregivers reported being exposed to an average of 7 traumatic events.

Violent trauma is often self-perpetuating.

Trauma affects the way people approach potentially helpful relationships.

Can be passed on through generations.
Responding to People with Trauma

- We may unintentionally trigger someone’s trauma response

- Organizations’ policies and environments may also retrigger trauma
Resources

- [http://www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)
  (National Institute of Mental Health)
- [http://annainstitute.org](http://annainstitute.org)
- [http://childtrauma.org/](http://childtrauma.org/)

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