

# INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA



# AGENDA

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- 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

# 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



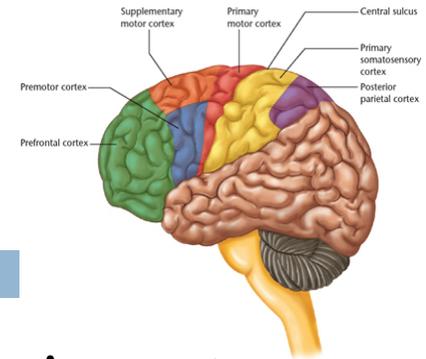
Affect Dysregulation  
Attention/Concentration  
Negative Self-Image  
Impulse Control  
Aggression/Risk-taking  
Overdependence/Clinginess  
ODD/Conduct Dx  
Sexual Problems  
Attachment Problems  
Substance Abuse

# 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

# Brain Development



- 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

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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

# Parent/Caregiver Trauma

- 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.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/ptsdmenu.cfm>  
(National Institute of Mental Health)
- <http://annainstitutue.org>
- <http://childtrauma.org/>