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Trauma & Healing 101

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Goals for today's presentation

- Definitions: What is trauma? How does it affect us emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually?
- Recognizing common trauma responses (Fight/Flight/Freeze/Appease) and ways to manage these
- Stages of healing: The importance of building safety and how to do this
- Sexual abuse and violence: Myths and facts, and how these can help us foster safety and healing

Take care of yourself first

- I'm going to be covering a lot of information today
- Please feel free to get up, get a drink of water, take deep breaths, take a break - whatever you need in order to be OK as we discuss some tough things
- There will be time for Q&A at the end but let me know if there's anything I can clarify along the way
- You may not be able to absorb everything right now and that's OK! I'll be available by email for further questions after today, and we're also working on putting together some smaller groups to process this

What is Trauma?

Trauma is an event or series of events that overwhelm our ability to cope and leave us feeling utterly helpless.

"Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning."

*-Judith Hermann, *Trauma and Recovery**

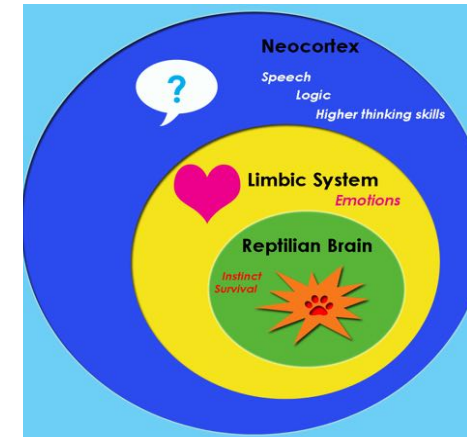
Trauma exists on a spectrum of intensity/overwhelm and can be a single event or a sustained series of events or state of being.

Healing is Possible

- People are extremely resilient & resiliency can be fostered
- We know a lot more now than we used to about how to help with recovery after trauma
- Many, many people who have experienced even severe trauma go on to lead healthy, happy, fulfilling lives



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The Triune Brain

A useful way to think about trauma's effects

Diagram via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triune_brain.png, used under Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike 2.5 Generic License; original author Lchunhori

Trauma & Memory

There are different kinds of memory (4 that we know of)

- They vary in how conscious they are and how much emotional and narrative information they contain

Trauma memories are often stored without much narrative information but with a LOT of emotional information

- >This means when you remember them, it often feels like you're reliving them (=a flashback)

But you are not a computer! We can work with our memories to shift how they are stored and how we relate to them when they come up

Fight • Flight • Freeze • Appease



Involuntary survival instincts

- Governed by nervous system
- Not under conscious control
- Aimed at giving you the best chance of survival
- Useful in the short term
- Long-term persistence after the danger has passed can develop into PTSD



Fight

- **Highly activated, energetic state**
- Blood flow to arms creates increased strength
- Can manifest as irritability, jumpiness, anger, rage, urge to hit/punch, belligerence, hostility

Flight

- **Highly activated, energetic state**
- Blood flow to legs creates increased speed
- Can manifest as restlessness/fidgeting, feeling trapped, moving constantly, feeling the urge to run away, over-exercising, hypervigilance

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Freeze

- **A slowed down, frozen state**
- Blood flow away from limbs and into torso to prioritize core functions
- Can manifest as feelings of cold or numbness, a feeling of dread, dissociative feelings (feeling like you aren't real or the world isn't real, "going through the motions"), detachment, being unable to move or speak, helplessness, feeling abandoned or unwanted

Appease

- **When Fight/Flight/Freeze have failed**
- Looks like being overly agreeable, excessively concerned with making others happy
- Avoid further conflict at all costs
- Common after childhood abuse
- Even when you know you're being mistreated, you may work overtime to please the person hurting you

It's common for trauma survivors to alternate between over-activated and under-activated states; think of alternately slamming on the accelerator and the brake in car.

Healing from trauma involves helping the nervous system to re-regulate itself so you don't experience as many extremes of nervous system activation.

Grounding Techniques

A way to help regulate the nervous system

→ For more activated, energized states: try to soothe

→ For frozen state: try to energize **SLOWLY**

Examples of grounding techniques:

- Hold a piece of ice, frozen orange, or bag of frozen veggies. Put it against your face or wrists
- Grab the arm of your chair, edge of the table, etc, and hold tight. Notice everything you can about the feeling and describe it to yourself
- Walk slowly or tap your feet alternately on the floor. Say "left, right" as you do so
- Say an orienting statement: "My name is Brennan. It's 2023. I'm in the parish hall at church. I'm giving a talk on trauma."
- Repeat a favorite quote or phrase to yourself
- Sing or hum a favorite song
- Picture a safe place where you always feel cozy and taken care of. Try to remember as many details as possible

“Trauma is a chronic disruption of connection.”

–psychiatrist and neuroscientist Stephen Porges



Trauma makes it difficult to trust your instincts about yourself and other people and therefore disrupts your natural ability to connect with others in healthy and fulfilling ways.

Learning how to rebuild trust in yourself and in healthy relationships with other people is one of the biggest goals of trauma therapy.

Community & Healing



Because trauma is “a chronic disruption of connection,” community plays a big role in the healing process. Responding to allegations of abuse in an open, non-judgmental, non-shaming way helps mitigate trauma symptoms in survivors and create an environment where abuse can’t fly under the radar.

The 3 Stages of Trauma Healing

“The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure.”

–psychiatrist Judith Hermann

- 1. Safety & Stabilization**
- 2. Remembrance & Mourning**
- 3. Reconnection & Integration**

Traumatic events “...violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.... Traumatic events destroy the victim’s fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation.”

—psychiatrist Judith Hermann

DARVO

An acronym to describe the way perpetrators often react to being held accountable for their behavior

Deny
Attack
Reverse
Victim &
Offender

Sexual Abuse Facts

- About 93% of children who are abused know their abuser (RAINN)
- About 73% of survivors wait at least a year before disclosing. About 45% wait at least 5 years. (RAINN)
- About 1 in 4 adult women and 1 in 6 adult men have experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault at some point
- False accusations are rare (the best studies suggest that >90% of accusations are true)

Grooming

- Perpetrators seek kids who are trusting and they work hard to build trust with kids and their families before any abusive behavior begins
- Perpetrators gradually escalate physical contact so that kids become acclimatized to a lack of boundaries and are more likely to second-guess any misgivings they have
- Perpetrators may use rewards to entice kids’ cooperation, leaving kids feeling confused or to blame for the abuse
- Perpetrators often blame the kid for their behavior or lie about accepted morals and social norms to excuse their behavior
- Perpetrators often try to isolate kids or emphasize that they are the only one who really understands or loves the them
- Perpetrators encourage secret-keeping, sometimes starting with innocuous things

-CAC Houston and the Center for Child Protection

The 6 Stages of Grooming

- Targeting the child
- Gaining the child's and family's trust
- Filling a need
- Isolating the child
- Sexualizing the relationship
- Maintaining control

-Center for Child Protection

Why Don't Kids Tell?

FEAR

- Abusers often threaten survivors
- Fear of getting the abuser into trouble
- Fear of harming important relationships
- Fear that they won't be believed

SHAME

- Abusers often convince kids that they are responsible for the abuse
- General feelings of shame about sex and sexuality

CONFUSION

- Abusers often work hard to confuse survivors about what happened and why
- Kids may not understand that what happened was abuse

-National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Q&A

