USING THE LENS OF TRAUMA TO UNDERSTAND THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING

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Agenda

- Trauma and Its Impact
- Relationship between trauma and bullying
- Trauma-informed strategies for intervention
- A final comment: grit, resilience, and post-traumatic growth
Grief and trauma

GRIEF
• Generalized reaction is SADNESS
• Grief reactions stand ALONE
• Known to public and professionals
• Does not disfigure identity
• Regret says “I wish I would have…”
• Dreams of person who died, was hurt
• Pain is related to the loss
• Anger is not destructive

TRAUMA
• Generalized reaction is TERROR
• Trauma reactions generally include grief reactions
• Largely unknown (esp. in children)
• Attacks and distorts identity
• Guilt says, “It was my fault.”
• Dreams of self dying, being hurt
• Pain is related to tremendous terror and sense of powerlessness, fear
• and loss of safety
• Anger is assaultive (even if non-violent trauma)
What is trauma?

Any experience that leaves a person feeling hopeless, helpless, fearing for their life/survival, their safety. This experience can be REAL or PERCEIVED.

The National Institute of Trauma and Loss in Children
Keep in Mind

Trauma reactions are **no different** following non-violent situations such as natural disasters, chronic illness, etc.
Trauma Exposure

- **Victim** (abuse, neglect, car accident)
- **Witness** (personal witness – domestic violence, police, fire)
- **Related to** (peer, siblings – of chronically ill siblings, sibling that completed suicide)
- **Listening to details of trauma** (therapists, media exposure, video games, etc.)
# Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (DSM 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Re-experiencing (INTRUSION – 1)</th>
<th>Avoidance (NUMBING - 1)</th>
<th>Negative Cognitions and Mood (2)</th>
<th>Arousal (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flashbacks</td>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>Distorted sense of self</td>
<td>Aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive thoughts - images</td>
<td>Numbing</td>
<td>Estrangement to others</td>
<td>Reckless behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traumatic dreams</td>
<td>OCD like behavior</td>
<td>Markedly diminished interest</td>
<td>Self-destructive and Rule-breaking behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleep problems</td>
<td>Self Harm</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Hypervigilence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical complaints</td>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>Blames self or others</td>
<td>Irritability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eating Disorders</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inattention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not wanting to talk about it</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive/Learning problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Overlapping Symptoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom Overlap (Weinstein et al., 2000)</th>
<th>ADHD</th>
<th>PTSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypervigilence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inattention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger Outbursts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distracted</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restless</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impatient</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited sense of future</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Concentrating</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of Trauma

• Type 1 – Single exposure
• Type 2 – One type of exposure that is repeated OR exposure to one or two different events
• Type 3 – Complex Cumulative Trauma/Developmental Trauma Disorder
Acute Stress vs. Posttraumatic Stress

- **Acute Stress** – NORMAL Response/Reaction to stress and even trauma – 4-6 weeks
- **Posttraumatic Stress** – Exaggerated and Prolonged Stress Response beyond 4-6 weeks and even years later
  - Dysregulation of Stress Chemistry – Stress hormones don’t come back down
  - Increased activation of the Sympathetic Nervous System (heart rate, startle response, fight response)
Trauma is a Sensory Experience

Trauma is a sensory experience because of what happens to the brain and memory during trauma.
Secondary Traumatic Stress

- **Secondary traumatic stress** is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Anatomy of the Brain
# Functions of the Brain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Right Brain (Sensory)</th>
<th>Left Brain (Thinking)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senses</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Regulation</td>
<td>Understanding/Processing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stress Response System

• Exposure to a trauma inducing event

• --------→ **SURVIVOR** is frozen in an activated state of arousal (state of fear, state of alert, survival mode)

• --------→ **STRESS HORMONES** are released – cortisol, adrenalin, etc.
Stress Response System

- This surge in stress hormones creates changes in the brain (and actually damages the brain when arousal is prolonged.)
- Changes in the brain cause changes in a person’s (the survivor) cognitive, behavioral and emotional functions.
Left Brain and Right Brain

- Both brain hemispheres are affected.
- The first thing that happens is that the left and right brain don’t integrate and work together – There is no cooperation between the two hemispheres.
How Trauma Impacts Left Brain

• No language.
• No reasoning skills.
• Unable to make sense out of what happened.
• The neurons in the Hippocampus are damaged significantly by the stress hormone release.
• Learning, processing, focusing is impaired.
How Trauma Impacts Right Brain

- Trauma memory is stored here!
- No words to describe, only Sensory memories – sight, sounds, touch, smell, taste
- Iconic Symbolization (Images)
- Affect/Dysregulation
Short and Long Term Effects

• We see twice the number of serious health and mental health problems as those without a history of trauma.
  • Chronic fatigue
  • Poor Immune function
  • Eating Disorders & Obesity
  • Hypertension
  • Interpersonal difficulties
  • Aggressive behavior
  • Low self-esteem
  • Depression
  • Anxiety

• 94 billion dollars per year (economic costs of trauma)
ACE Study - http://www.cdc.gov/ace/

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being.
- More than 17,000 participants
- Findings suggest that certain experiences are major risk factors for the leading causes of illness and death as well as poor quality of life in the United States.
ACE STUDY

Mechanisms by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan
Bullying must be viewed through a trauma lens

• Why?

1. Our research- and evidence-based prevention efforts are currently at a systems level, but the affects of bullying ultimately occur inside individuals.

2. Any involvement in a bullying situation can cause PTSD

3. Most importantly, the very definition of trauma applies here
Beyond Bullying Summit 2013

Establish safe and supportive environments
   a. Strong professional communities
   b. Every child with at least one trusted adult
   c. Every child feels that s/he belongs
   d. Shared sense of purpose

Cultivate student social and emotional core competencies
   a. Self-Awareness
   b. Self-Management
   c. Social awareness
   d. Relationship Skills
   e. Responsible decision making

Trauma

- **Victim** (abuse, neglect, car accident)
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Bullying

- **Bully-Victim**
- **Victim**
- **Bully**
- **Witness**
  - Henchman
  - Active supporters
  - Passive supporters
  - Disengaged onlookers
  - Potential defenders
Bullying needs a lens of trauma

Trauma
Any experience that leaves a person feeling hopeless, helpless, fearing for their life/survival, their safety. This experience can be REAL or PERCEIVED.

Bullying
Unwarranted and intentional
Repetitive or likely to be repeated
Real or perceived imbalance of power
Compelling comparisons

Targeted
- Dan Olweus and his colleagues in 1973 found that victims of bullying are 7 times more likely to be adult victims of domestic violence.
- In the original 1998 ACEs study, 15% of those participants who reported 4 or more ACEs also reported being raped later in life.

Perpetrating
- Olweus and his colleagues found that males who engage in aggressive behavior and identified by age 8 are
  - 6x more likely to be convicted of a crime by 24.
  - 5x more likely to have a serious criminal record by age 30.
- In the ACEs study, 10% of females and 14% of males who reported 5 or more ACEs became perpetrators of domestic violence in adulthood.

- [http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus_authors.page](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus_authors.page)
- [https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/](https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/)
For those targeted

• Learned Helplessness (Seligman, 1975)
  • Matter of classical conditioning
  • Repeated exposure to a painful experience leads a person to stop avoiding the treatment
    • Behave in a helpless manner
    • Overlook opportunities for relief or change

https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/people/martin-ep-seligman
What can we do? How can we help?

- Help lower intense hyper-arousal
- Help improve emotional regulation
You can only reduce arousal on a sensory level, not a cognitive level

- So will talking about it help? Will telling the person they are safe help?
- Maybe, a little bit...but it is in what we do to make people feel safe, feel better, on a sensory level that helps, that reduces arousal.
Because Trauma Is A Sensory Experience…

- We must use SENSORY INTERVENTIONS to help relieve the pain and terror associated with the trauma.
- REMEMBER, there are no words, only images, sensory memories of a trauma.
- So when a person “doesn’t want to talk about it” many times it is more like…”they can’t”.
- Also, a person may not “remember” their experience but you can still work on a sensory level with them.
Trauma-informed strategies

- Normalize effects
- Create awareness
- Engage in activities
- Practice
A Final Thought:
Grit, Resilience, and PTG

- Grit: perseverance and determination, focus and drive toward a goal
- Resilience: “bounce back”, capacity to recover quickly when faced with adversity
- Post-traumatic growth: coming to a new perspective about life after overcoming adversity
For more on this topic:

- Bully-Free Schools
  - [https://oakland.k12.mi.us/instructional/school-classroom/bullying/Pages/default.aspx](https://oakland.k12.mi.us/instructional/school-classroom/bullying/Pages/default.aspx)
  - [http://www.misd.net/sshschools/bullyfreeschools.html](http://www.misd.net/sshschools/bullyfreeschools.html)
- The National Institute of Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC)
  - [https://starr.org/training/tlc](https://starr.org/training/tlc)
- My social media world:
  - [https://jemmuldoon.blogspot.com/](https://jemmuldoon.blogspot.com/)
  - Twitter: @jemmuldoon
  - Pinterest: jemmuldoon
Contact me directly!

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