Recognizing and Responding to Trauma: An Introduction for School Counselors

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Agenda

- Trauma overview
- Impact of trauma on students/learning
- ACEs study
- Trauma-informed schools/school counseling
- Resources
Definition of Trauma

- An event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening.
  - The experience has lasting adverse effects on functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.
  - The experience is more than a person can cope with at the time or cope with alone.

SAMHSA (n.d.)
T or t?
Acute Trauma (T) Examples

- School shootings
- Gang violence
- Terrorist attacks
- Natural disasters
- Serious accidents
- Sudden or violent loss
- Physical or sexual assault

NCTSN (n.d.)
Chronic Trauma (t) Examples

- Repeated abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Witnessing IPV
- Divorce
- Parent/caregiver addiction
- Parent/caregiver incarceration
- Parent/caregiver mental illness
- Poverty
- Repeated community violence

NCTSN (n.d.)
Symptomology

- Difficulty concentrating
- Affect disturbance
- Aggressive behavior
- Moodiness
- Isolation
- Changes in eating habits
- Disruptive behavior
- Hypo or hypervigilance
- Lower GPA
- Decreased IQ
- Intense reactions
- Disrespectful

- Lack of self-regulation
- Inconsistent grades
- Impulsive behavior
- Frequently tired
- Chronic absenteeism
- Pattern of concern in cumulative file
- Chronic anxiety
- Difficulty with change
- Frequent visits to nurse
- Mistrust of others
- Suspicious

NCTSN (n.d.)
Trauma Response

- Fight (aggression)
- Flight (avoidance)
- Freeze (dissociation)
- Overload of stress hormones
- Inability to function at set-point

Felitti et al. (1998)
Comorbid and Misdiagnoses

- Acute stress disorder
- ADHD
- Anxiety
- Depression
- OCD
- ODD
- Reactive attachment disorder

D’Andrea et al. (2012)
Myths about Trauma

- Children will forget traumatic incidents.
- We can predict who will be affected by trauma.
- We can predict the impact of trauma.
- One cannot heal from trauma.
- If you are mentally strong, you will not be impacted by trauma.
Risk Factors for Developing PTSD

- Prior exposure to trauma (type)
- Elevated distress at time of trauma
- Family instability
- Gender (assaultive violence)
- Ethnic minority
- Lower socioeconomic status
- Lower level of education
- Genetic predisposition
- Current or past mental illness

Halligan & Yehuda (2000)
The Body Remembers...
Implicit vs Explicit Memory
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs Study)

- Largest epidemiological research study on trauma and health outcomes.
- Original sample size n=17,337.
- ACEs are common in most adults.
- Strong correlation with long term health consequences and number of ACEs.
- Led to numerous other studies including epigenetics, neurobiology, environmental impact, protective factors, childhood trauma, etc.

Felitti et al. (1998)
ACES Questionnaire

**Personal**
- Physical abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

**Family Members**
- Substance abuse
- IPV victim
- Incarceration
- Mental illness
- Loss of parent

Felitti et al. (1998)
Findings from the ACE Study

- With an ACE increase from 0-4, individuals are:
  - 242% more likely to smoke;
  - 222% more likely to become obese;
  - 288% more likely to contract an STI;
  - 357% more likely to experience depression;
  - 443% more likely to use illicit drugs;
  - 555% more likely to develop alcoholism;
  - 1133% more likely to use injected drugs; and
  - 1525% more likely to attempt suicide.

Felitti et al. (1998)
Findings from the ACE Study

- Individuals with 4 or more ACEs were 2x as likely to be diagnosed with cancer.
- For each ACE a woman experienced, she was 20% more likely to be hospitalized with an autoimmune disorder.
- Individuals with an ACE score of 4 were 460% more likely to develop depression than someone with zero ACEs.
- Six or more ACEs shortened an individual’s lifespan by 20 years.

Nakazawa (2015)
Figure 2. Mechanisms by which Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)Lead to Poor Outcomes in Adulthood

Conception

Death

Adverse childhood experiences

Disrupted neurodevelopment

Social, emotional, and cognitive impairment

Adoption of health-risk behaviors

Disease, disability, and social problems

Early death

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Trauma-Informed Schools in the News

- San Francisco’s El Dorado Elementary uses trauma-informed & restorative practices; suspensions drop 89%
- Landmark lawsuit filed in California to make trauma-informed practices mandatory for all public schools
- There’s no such thing as a bad kid in these Spokane, WA, trauma-informed elementary schools
Trauma-Informed School Counseling

- Educate
- Collaborate
- Advocate

“Kids who are experiencing the toxic stress of severe and chronic trauma just can’t learn. It’s physiologically impossible.” Jim Sporleder
Trauma-Informed School Counseling

- Establish safety and trust
- Always empower (avoid power struggles)
- Unconditional positive regard
- Maintain high expectations
- Engage and question to avoid misunderstandings
- Guide and help students build relationships
- Validate their experiences
- Avoid retraumatization

Wolpow et al (2011)
Helping Students Cope with Trauma

- Incorporate grounding techniques (notice body sensations, notice things in the room, count colors, count foods, sit on floor, etc.)
- Help students identify triggers
- Integrate sensory practices: i.e., yoga, mindfulness (be careful!), breath work, sand tray, play, art, etc.
Case Example

“Tom is walking to lunch in the cafeteria when his classmate Marc bumps into him in the crowded hallway. The students’ eighth grade math teacher, Ms. Clark, hears Tom and Marc begin to yell at one another and steps into the hall just as Tom punches Marc in the face. Ms. Clark and her colleague Mr. Jones step in to break up the fight. This is the third fight Tom has been in this school year” (p. 12)


McInerney & McKlindon (2015)
Case Example

*Initial response*
Traditional: Security guard is called, students are escorted to the main office. Trauma-informed: Students are separated and brought into different rooms to calm down with trusting adults who talk to them about what is going on, not what happened.

*Discipline*
Traditional: Both students are suspended, their parents are called and told their children are problematic. Trauma-informed: Students are escorted with their teachers and talk about what happened with the principal in a non-confrontational fashion; both students are given in-school suspension.

McInerney & McKlindon (2015)
Mind/Body Resources

- Calm.com
- Yoga 4 Classrooms
- Kids Yoga Stories
- Children’s Yoga Books on Amazon
- How to Make a Mindfulness Glitter Jar
- Go Noodle
- Go Zen
- Smiling Mind App
- Falling Stars App
Web Resources

- ACEsTooHigh.com
- Child Maltreatment 2014*
- Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescence*
- Essentials for Children: Steps to Create Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments*
- Helping Traumatized Children Learn
- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
  - NCTSN Learning Center*
- TED Talk: How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime
- Trauma Center at JRI
- The Heart of Teaching and Learning*
- Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools*
Book Recommendations

- Childhood Disrupted: How Your Biography Becomes Your Biology and How You Can Heal - Donna Jackson Nakazawa
- The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma - Bessel van der kolk
- The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment - Babette Rothschild
- The PTSD Workbook for Teens - Libbi Palmer
- Trauma Through a Child’s Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing - Peter Levine and Maggie Klein
References

References

Thank You.
Questions? Comments?