

# Understanding Trauma - Implications for Helping Professionals

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## Victims of PTSD

- Feeling of being “hijacked”
- Have no control over self
- Angry and frozen; hate self for what has happened to them
- They identify themselves by the trauma they have experienced - incest victim, Vietnam War veteran.
- Nobody wants to go back and experience it again. Nobody wants to tell the story of what happened - like in a social setting. What the victim ends up sharing is something they can tolerate.
- Adult onset trauma (can be treated by EMDR) vs. child onset trauma (not so easy to resolve with EMDR)
- Exponentially larger number of child victims of trauma than adults - incest, domestic violence . . .
- The frontal lobe shuts down and victims resort to using the limbic system (survival brain)
  - The memory of the event sits in the hippocampus and amygdala and sometimes the cerebellum.

Pointing out how irrational the victim is will not make them more rational.

- Goal - How can we make irrational/unreasonable people rational and reasonable?

## EMDR - Cornerstone of trauma treatment

- Thoughts associated with the trauma have a tendency to be interwoven with the thoughts of everyday life.
- Allows the victim to separate the thoughts from the trauma from everyday life.
- You ask the victim to think about the trauma but don't allow them to talk. Then you move your fingers back and forth in front of them (hypnosis-esque). This allows the brain to dissociate itself with the trauma and helps the victim to realize the trauma is a past event and will not affect the present.
- Eye movements calm the brain down
- Economical advantage - no prescription drug costs

## Helping trauma victims overcome PTSD

- Create a safe place and then expose the victim to a slight/small aspect of the trauma and then return back to the safe place. Repeat . . . with each exposure becoming more intense - EXTINCTION.

## ACE Study

- Eating disorder study
- Overweight is overlooked - it's a defense mechanism

- Weight can be a characteristic of trauma.

#### Correlates of Disturbed Attachment vs. Unresolved Trauma

- No attachment = problems (trauma -like)
- America has a high prison population leading to millions of attachment problems
  - To decrease the prison population, create social welfare programs to help parents parent their children.
- Bad health is a reflection of trauma
  - Healthy kids don't eat fatty foods or drink excessive amounts of soda because they have healthy relationships with their parents - ATTACHMENT.
  - Unhealthy kids drink a lot of soda because of attachment issues.
- Individuals without childhood trauma are more likely to respond to medicine.
- Individuals with childhood trauma are less likely to respond to antidepressant drugs.
- Opioid Crisis - result of the childhood environments in the U.S. today.

#### MDMA

- Ultimate self-compassion "drug"

#### How do kids process traumatic experiences?

- Depends on the quality of their attachment relationships
  - Safe relationship with parent in a dangerous environment will actually trump trauma

#### Treatment for Trauma

- Get people moving - martial arts, dance, running
  - Trauma paralysis
- Limbic system therapy - hardly exists; most therapy is based off of frontal lobe therapy
- Support