

Calling for a Trauma- informed Education System?

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Purpose

- To raise awareness around trauma and loss in children and awareness that many school youth are emotionally and psychologically wounded.
- To raise the discussion as to how trauma externalizes itself as an impediment to school performance
- To connect this concern to the potential for the education system to help young people overcome this adversity

Definitions

- A traumatic event is an event which threatens injury, death, or the physical body of a child or adolescent while also causing shock, terror or helplessness (American Psychological Association [APA], 2008).

Complex Trauma

- Children's experiences of multiple traumatic events that occur within the caregiving system – ,the social environment that is supposed to be the source of safety and stability in a child's life (National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2003).

A Public Health Issue!

CHILDREN ARE HAVING NORMAL
REACTIONS TO ABNORMAL EVENTS
AND
THAT IS IMPACTING SCHOOL
PERFORMANCE!

Statistics

- Each year as many as 17.8 million youth are exposed to domestic violence as witnesses or as victims
- Evans, Davies & DiLillo (2008)
- 50% or more of children surveyed who had been exposed to trauma show difficulties in affect regulation, attention and concentration, negative self image, impulse control and aggression/risk taking (NCTSN), 2003.

Trauma can compromise Cognitive Development

- “Early negative life events have a strong impact on cognitive deficits.”
Steele, William. (2008).

Stress causes the release of chemicals that can damage the area of the brain responsible for memory. This increases memory deficit.
Steele, William. (2008).

Physical Symptoms of Trauma:

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension

Emotional and Psychological Symptoms of Trauma

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Anxiety and fear

Anxiety Impacts the Brain

- Changes in the brain are triggered by a variety of stress related functions. (van der Kolk, 1996, cited in Steele, 2008)
- Lower memory volume in the left-brain (Bremner et al., 1996, cited in Steele, 2008)
- Functional alterations take place in the neocortex. (Perry & Szalavitr, 2001)

Anxiety Impedes Learning

- Hard to process verbal information
 - Hard to follow direction
 - Hard to remember what has been said
 - Hard to make sense of what has been said

Anxiety Impedes School Functioning

- Hard to focus (bring the mind to the task)
- Hard to pay attention (block out other thoughts)
- Hard to retain (hold on to information)
- Hard to recall (bring back what was heard)

Why do schools need to be trauma-informed?

- There are factors that put youth at-risk of suffering trauma.
- Research compiled by the Department of Justice indicates that 60% of the nation's children have experienced trauma.

Some Risk Factors for Trauma

http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/43042/ecec_development_and_trauma_intro.pdf

- • history of neglect or abuse, state care, child death
- • or placement of child or siblings
- • separations from parents/caregivers
- • parent, partner, close relative or sibling with a
- history of assault, prostitution or sexual offences
- • experience of intergenerational abuse/trauma
- • compounded or unresolved experiences of loss and grief

Risk Factors (cont.)

http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/43042/ecec_development_and_trauma_intro.pdf

- • chaotic household/lifestyle
- poverty, financial hardship, unemployment
- • social isolation (family, extended family, community)
- Cultural isolation
- • inattention to developmental health needs/poor diet
- • disadvantaged community
- • racism
- • recent refugee experience

Risk Factors (cont.)

http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/43042/ecec_development_and_trauma_intro.pdf

- • inadequate housing/transience/homelessness
- • parent/carer under 20 years at birth of 1st child
- • harsh, inconsistent discipline, neglect or abuse
- • lack of parent willingness or ability to prioritize child's needs above own
- • rejection or scape-goating of child
- • inadequate supervision of child

Trauma Impacts Discipline

- Children can be misread as:
- Resistant
- Stubborn
- Over reactive
- Impulsive
- Confrontational
- Learning Disabled
- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

Trauma Impacts Behavior and May Display As:

- Aggression
- Agitation
- Exaggerated withdrawal
- Loss of small motor activities
- Unable to talk or stuttering
- Unable to sleep

Causes: Disruptions in a child's sense of safety and security -

- An unstable or unsafe environment
- Separation from a parent
- Serious illness
- Intrusive medical procedures
- Sexual, physical, or verbal abuse
- Domestic violence
- Neglect
- Bullying

10 Common Causes

- **1. Bullying - 22% - A peer picked on child (for example, by chasing, grabbing hair or clothes, or making child do something he or she did not want to do).**
- 2. Assault with injury - 10% - Someone hit or attacked child, and child was physically hurt when this happened. (Hurt means child felt pain the next day, or had a bruise, a cut that bled, or a broken bone.) No weapon was used.**
- 3. Assault with a weapon - 8% - Someone hit or attacked child on purpose with something that would hurt (like a stick, rock, gun, knife or other thing).**
- 4. Exposure to shooting, bombs, riots - 6%
Child was in a place (in real life) where child could see or hear random shootings, terror bombings, or riots.**
- 5. Non-sexual genital assault - 5% - A peer tried to hurt child's private parts on purpose by hitting or kicking.**

10 Common Causes

- **6. Robbery by non-sibling- 4%** - A non-sibling (peer or adult) used force to take something away from child that child was carrying or wearing.
- 7. Physical abuse by caregiver - 4%**
An adult in child's life hit, beat, kicked, or physically abused child in any way.
- 8. Witness domestic violence - 4%** - Child saw one parent get hit (for example, slapped, hit, punched, or beat up) by another parent, or parent's boyfriend or girlfriend.
- 9. Sexual assault - 3%** - Someone touched child's private parts when unwanted, make child touch their private parts, or forced child to have sex. Or attempted any of these acts.
- 10. Murder of someone close - 3%** - Someone close to child (for example, family member, friend, or neighbor) was murdered.

Signs of Resilience

- Signs of a Resilient Child
- The ability to bounce back.
- The capacity to have courage.
- The motivation to move forward.
- The power to stay centered.
- The awareness of knowing themselves.
- The gift of laughter.
- The potential of showing promise.
- The capacity to ask for help.
- The tenacity to accomplish goals.
- The willingness to share feelings.
- The capability to connect with others.
- The inspiration to give back.
- The ability to choose.

Methods of Promoting Resilience

- Increasing children's self-esteem.
- Changing the harmful series of life events.
- Providing alternate directions for success.
- Removing the stressor.
- Maintaining nurturing relationships.
- Creating positive peer and adult interactions.
- Sustaining a feeling of connectedness

How the School Can Help

- Schools need an organized protocol for crisis intervention -
 - Students, staff and parents need to hear from someone in authority
 - All students need to hear the same presentation and information

How School Can Help

- Students need access to someone to:

listen, attend, acknowledge, summarize, reflect, normalize, nurture, give correct information, plan for the day and the future

- Parents will benefit from receiving information on how to respond to and help their children

How School Can Help

Create experiences that:

- Teach about the value of life
- Show caring for others
- Collaboration to support one another
- Restore hope

Assure that the arts are part of every school curriculum

References

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