

Trauma and The Courtroom



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What is Trauma?



- Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (SAMHSA)

What is Trauma?

- Trauma occurs when an actual or perceived threat of danger (or loss) overwhelms a person’s usual coping ability”
 - ✦ Beverly James

- Coping ability is made up of

- Resiliency
- Life experience
- Mastery of various skill sets
- Education



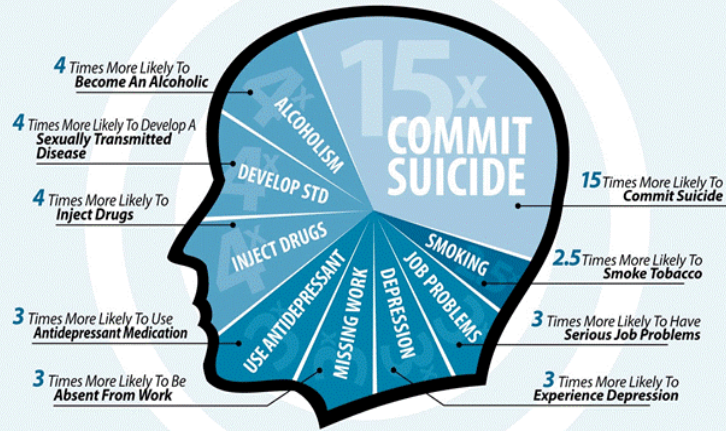
What is trauma?

- Trauma may induce feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror.
- Trauma may be experienced by ***everyone!***
- Trauma is relative.
 - What may be a traumatic event for me may not be for you. Our past experiences and coping skills impact our reactions.

Quick Review: Complex Trauma

- repetitive, prolonged, or cumulative
- most often interpersonal, involving direct harm, exploitation, and maltreatment including neglect/abandonment/antipathy by primary caregivers or other ostensibly responsible adults
- often occur at developmentally vulnerable times in the victim's life, especially in early childhood or adolescence, but can also occur later in life and in conditions of vulnerability associated with disability/disempowerment/dependency/age /infirmity, and so on.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA ARE:



Trauma and the Body

- Real or perceived danger or *even a reminder* can set our bodies into motion!
- While our bodies are made to handle trauma but it becomes dangerous and inhibiting when
 - The trauma is too severe.
 - It happens too long or too often.
 - It is reminded of often.



Trauma and the Body

- **Cortisol**- a chemical that regulates adrenaline and is responsible for increased energy during a stressful event.



Trauma and the Body

THE EFFECTS OF HIGH CORTISOL LEVELS



Higher blood pressure



Lowers body's ability to fight off disease and infections



Increases blood sugar levels, which may affect people with diabetes or a family history of diabetes



Causes increase in fat storage, especially around the abdomen

All of which can contribute to an increased chance of heart problems.

Trauma and the Body



- **Adrenaline**

- Fight, flight, freeze *or* Tend and Befriend
- Sharpens our focus, helps us make decisions during times of increased stress
- Momentarily increases our capacities to handle the threat
- Increases heart rate and blood pressure
- Moves blood away from systems that do not need it during these times (digestion, reproduction, etc)

Trauma and the Body Adrenaline



Trauma and the Body

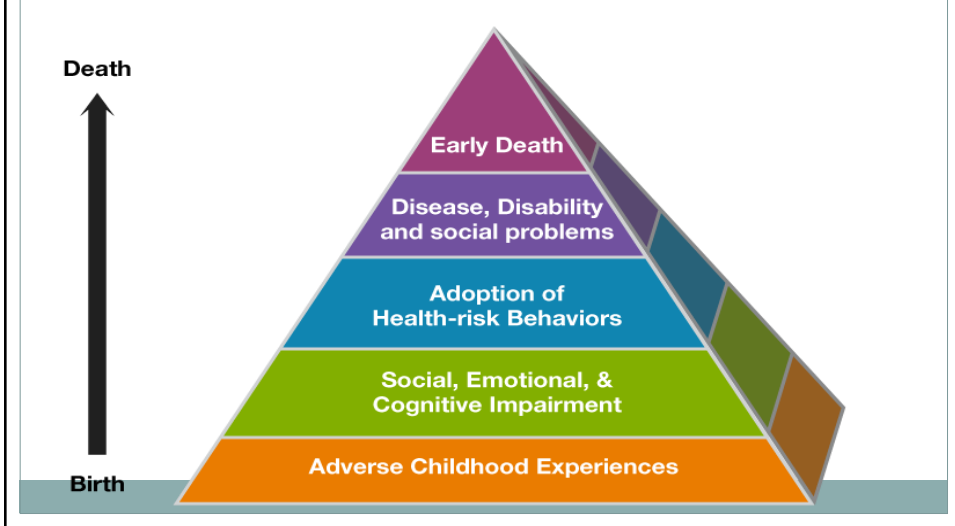
- **Adrenaline**
 - Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
 - Flashback to events
 - Increased adrenaline makes it difficult to decipher what is truly threatening and what is not.
 - ✦ Think of a client that is aggressive, defensive, or hyper-sensitive.

Trauma and the Body

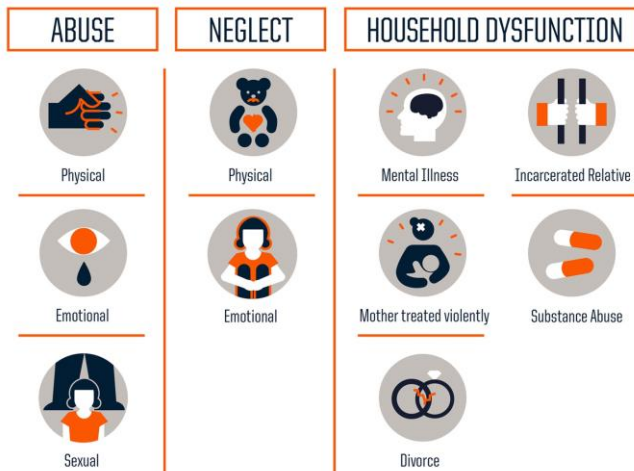
- **Oxytocin**
 - The “trust” or bonding chemical.
- **Damage to memory recall**
- **Bonding to a perpetrator**
- **Studies suggest that estrogen amplifies the effects of oxytocin!**



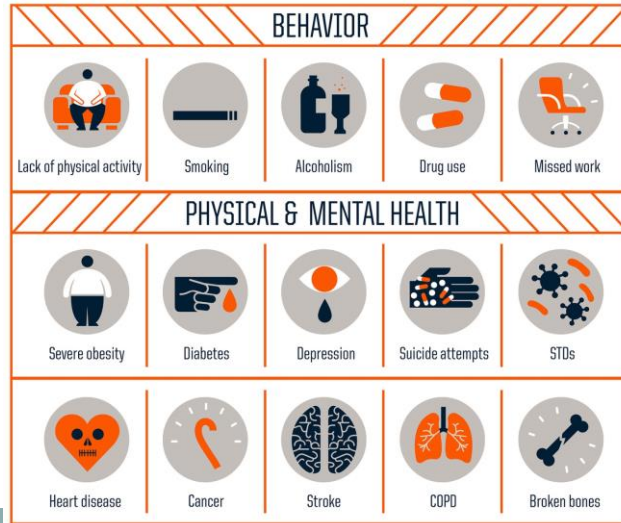
ACES Study Adverse Childhood Experiences



ACES Study



ACES Study



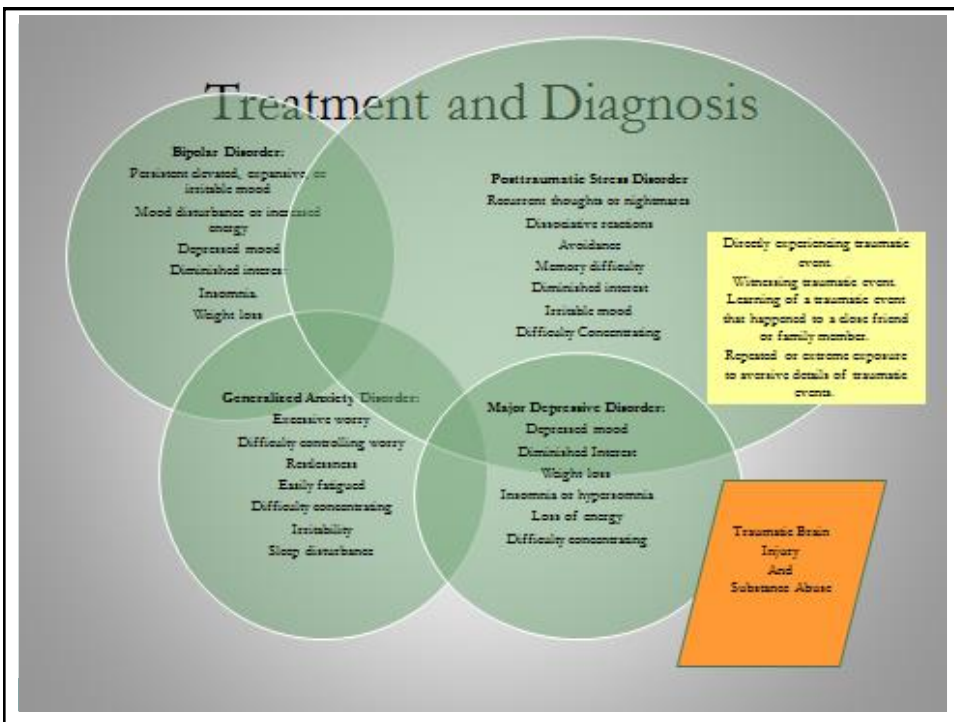
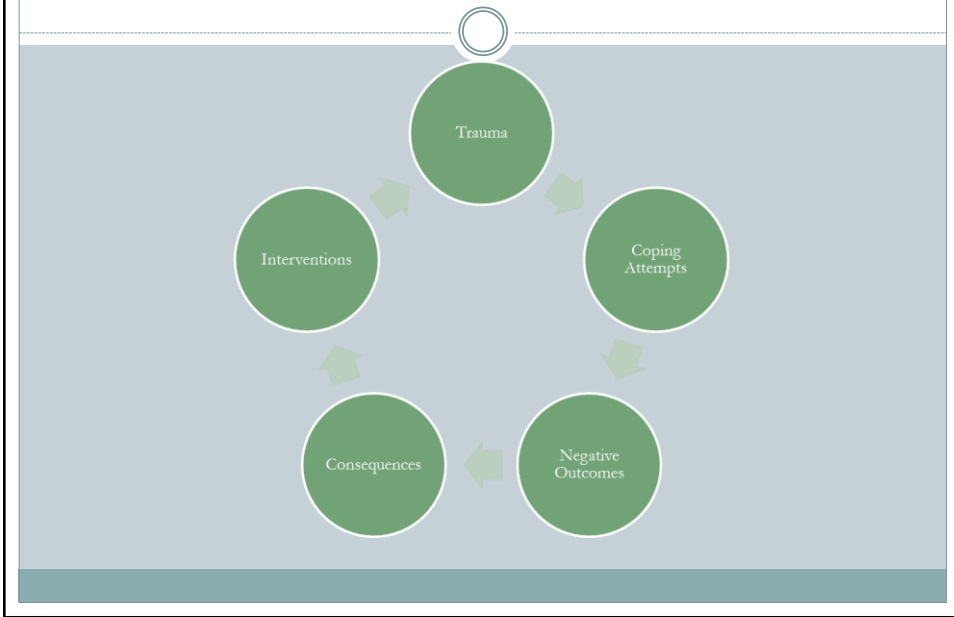
Trauma as Vulnerability



- Sexual, physical, emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Extreme poverty
- Lack of education
- Lack of social resources



Diagnosis and Treatment/Mistreatment



Trauma Related Disorders

- PTSD, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
 - Symptoms fall into three categories and may include:
 - ✦ **Re-experiencing:** Flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, nightmares
 - ✦ **Numbing and avoidance:** Avoidance, feeling numb, sleeping too much, substance abuse, repression
 - ✦ **Arousal:** startling easily, irritability, difficulty concentrating, intense emotions, self-harm

Trauma Related Disorders

- Anxiety Disorders
- Depression
- Dissociative Disorders
 - Disruption in memory, perceptions, unclear self-identity
- Borderline Personality Disorder
 - Extreme difficulty regulating emotions, impulsivity, chaotic relationships, unstable sense of self, suicide attempts, self-harm, shame, fears of abandonment, and chronic feelings of emptiness

Treating Trauma Survivors

- The simmering pot!
- Group Therapy
- Individual Therapy (may include unique trauma specific practices)
- Teaching self-care
 - Good diet and exercise
 - Consistent sleep practices, with plenty of rest!
 - Journaling
 - Yoga or guided breathing practices

Trauma Specific Treatments

- EMDR Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy
- Traumatic Incident Reduction
- Brainspotting

Traumatic Brain Injury

- The very traumas we are discussing may also have included physical injury. *Many* of our shared clients have experienced a Traumatic Brain Injury
- *Any* loss of consciousness following a head injury is cause for concern.
- Symptoms include:
 - Irritability
 - Thinking errors
 - Memory loss
 - Mood Swings
 - Difficulty paying attention

- L- Look interested.
- I- Involve yourself by responding.
- S- Stay on target.
- T- Test your understanding.
- E- Evaluate the message.
- N- Neutralize your feelings.

- Remember! “Listening is not waiting for my chance to talk.” (anon)

Power and Control



Practical Steps... *or ways to make your life easier!*

- **Be consistent!**
 - Set a firm appointment time.
 - Don't change the rules or expectations.
- **Stay calm.**
- **Give directions ONE step at a time.**
- **Stay focused.**
- **Take care of YOU!**
 - It will be impossible to provide care to others if your own needs are not being addressed!
 - Talk to a peer or supervisor when things are too hard!
 - Don't ignore feelings and be a great example of asking for help when you need it!