Resilience and Trauma

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What are we doing today?

- Resilience and why it matters (and why you never talk about trauma without talking about resilience)
- Stress: What is it and what does it do to us?
- Traumatic stress and its unique impact on us
- What does trauma-informed care actually look like?
- Provide tips for advocates working with survivors of trauma
This is US too

- Engaging with and bearing witness to others pain affects ALL of us
- We MUST be mindful and aware of:
  - How your own trauma has impacted you
  - How opening yourself up to other’s experiences impacts you

How we are
is as important
as what we do

National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health
Rule #1
Do No Harm
Very important resource

The Power and Price of Survival

Understanding Resilience, Stress, and Trauma

Pamela Woll, MA, CADP
Human Priorities

http://xrl.us/humanpriorities
Resilience

“The fact remains that we are resilient. That’s what we’re built to be, and there are more resources for resilience within us and around us than we can ever imagine. Our job is to look for and use those resources, and never stop believing in ourselves, no matter how hard it is.

Survival is much, much more than just staying alive. And the power of survival is written into us—all of us—down to the smallest cell.”

The Power and Price of Survival
Resilience

• Ability to “bounce back” from stress

• **EVERYONE** has it, but we often miss it.

• Resilience feeds itself
Advocacy Tip #1

Highlight and encourage resilience by helping people discover and/or identify their resources for resilience within them and around them.
Resilience

I HAVE
External supports and resources that promote resilience

I AM
Internal, personal strengths

I CAN
Social and interpersonal skills

http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/grotb95b.html
Extreme stress will always impact us.

But resilience can help protect us and help our bodies react in ways that are less extreme.

The Power and Price of Survival
Why focus on trauma?

What we **LEARN** and **KNOW** about traumatic stress defines, shapes, modifies and maybe changes **what we do** and how **we do** things with victims of traumatic experiences.
Humans are the only mammals for whom 50% of brain development occurs after birth through experience dependent maturation of neuronal systems.

Putnam, 2004
Experiences shape our brain
“The set of changes in the **body** and the **brain** that are set in to motion when there are overwhelming threats to physical or psychological well-being.”

From Neurons to Neighborhoods, National Resource Council and Institute of Medicine.
The stress continuum

Positive stress

- Brief increases in heart rate
- Mild elevations in stress response hormones

Tolerable Stress

- Serious, temporary stress responses
- With supportive relationships, unlikely to cause long term problems

Toxic Stress

- Prolonged activation of the stress response system
- Absence of supportive relationships

Traumatic Stress

- When our internal and external resources are inadequate to cope
- It overwhelms us
Our beings want BALANCE
Baseline

- We all have a normal baseline for emotional, cognitive, and behavioral functioning
- Ability to maintain this baseline has been developed by experiences over our lives

Miller and Miller, 2018 NCADV conference
Types of Stress

• Positive Stress
  – Short-lived adverse experiences
  – Normal part of developmental processes
Tolerable stress

- More intense but relatively short-lived
- With adequate support, unlikely to cause long-term problems
Toxic stress

- Sustained adversity
- Children are unable to manage by themselves
Traumatic stress

– When internal and external resources are inadequate to deal with external stress
Traumatic Stress

Hallmark of trauma: An overwhelming experience.

And we can’t get back in balance

- Events throw us off so much that it feels impossible to regain or balance

The Alaska Network on Domestic Violence And Sexual Assault, Miller and Miller, 2018 NCADV conference
What is traumatic stress?

- An EVENT, series of events or set of circumstances
- that is EXPERIENCED by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening
- and has lasting adverse EFFECTS on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being
What **EFFECT** has this had..

On this unique person in front of us?
Decreased ability to....

- Manage and regulate feelings
- Self-soothe
- Trust others
- Thoughtfully plan
- Have the energy to get things done
- Connect with others
- Tell stories

DVMHPI, Access to Advocacy Manual
Increased.....

- Tension, anxiety, panic, emotional volatility
- Need for control and aggressive behavior
- Avoidance, constriction and disassociation
- Use of drugs, alcohol or other addictions to manage feelings

DVMHPI Access to Advocacy Manual
It impacts:

- Functioning
  - Examples
- Physical wellbeing
  - Examples
- Social wellbeing
  - Examples

- Emotional wellbeing
  - Examples
- Spiritual wellbeing
  - Examples

SAMHSA Definition
When a partner hurts their spouse or partner by causing fear, threats and injury in the relationship; this partner is also hurting their babies, children and teens by putting them in the midst of the threats and harm. They don’t create a sense of co-parenting either.

These upsetting and on-going experiences likely create chronic stress, trauma and traumatic responses for the kids and their parent victimized by this type of hurting. Traumatic responses often show up in kid’s behavior. But they might not be noticed because their trauma reactions often look disruptive and perhaps disrespectful or they may be really quiet or clingy.

Living with or visiting a parent who batter and hurts puts children on high alert. Trauma causes people to be on high alert throughout the day and night for what could happen to them next.

It matters that you have come to stay here with your children. We are here to support you in comforting your children. Take a look on the back for ideas to support your children that help him or her to feel safer.
You, as their caring parent, taking the time to try these suggestions, can help regulate their behavior and reactions to things in the present moments.

Rocking & Swinging
Take some time to rock your babies and children in the playground and yard. The back and forth repeating motion of rocking is so soothing and calms children.

Humming & Singing
Singing or humming also has been shown to increase the feelings of goodness and control. Piling a favorite family song to sing together to build a stronger connection is a wonderful way to teach healthy coping to your children.

Playing
Every child and teen needs time to play. Moving and playing lets the body heal and gets rid of stress stored inside their bodies, especially when upsetting things have happened to them.

Playing on Floor—Giving younger kids daily times to play on the floor with you where they have your attention is an amazing way to offer your kids support, care, and love. This restores a sense of calm in your family.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking Water
Hungry and tired kids become irritable and have trouble listening, which in turn makes parenting more challenging. It’s important every day to feed a child healthy food, make sure they get enough water, and have plenty of rest because it helps manage the many feelings they are experiencing. It also regulates their blood glucose levels so their behavior stays more even.

Breathing
Your breath is your anchor to regulate emotions, shifting moods, and feeling calmer. Stress can cause us to breathe in a rapid way. Practice breathing with your children & teens many times a day. This helps kids learn to manage their sensations and feelings. Breathing in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth 4 or 5 times lowers blood pressure, slows heart rate and brings kids back to a sense of control.

Emotional & Physical Safety Planning With Children & Teens
If your child or teen needs support when they feel overwhelmed by too much or because of the changes, then making a plan for your child might help. If you are concerned or worried about more ideas, please know advocates are here to talk with you and your kids. We can also offer community referrals for extra support or counseling too.

Catch Them Doing Good
Finding times to support your children and catch them doing the right thing can go a long way in guiding your children and teens. So much of what your children have been through has caused hurt, so much that they need to feel loved and safe. Kids can feel safer when positive attention is given to them.

Give Hugs & Calm Responses
When domestic violence has happened in a family, hands and harsh words have no often caused hurting. Kids can feel safer when positive attention is given to them, filled with hugs and peaceful responses from their caring parent.

Talk With Your Babies, Children & Teens
Kids need to hear from you, their caring parent, that you understand upsetting things have changed their family. When each of you has been through fear, isolation and overwhelming rules, you can talk with them about what they worry about most, and what they miss most. You can praise them for being brave and strong even though each child may have mixed feelings about leaving.

Music & Dance
When times are demanding, get your kids moving in the right direction by using music, dancing or marching. You’ll create a positive feeling which brings laughter too. It can be easier on you then time out and taking away things. Building kids up and showing them that you have the skills to listen, work during times of change and loss.

Create & Keep Basic Routines
Having routines or doing the same thing each morning and night creates a sense of safety and consistency. This is important because the abusive person has always changed the rules and disrupted routines.

Inspire Hope & Joy
Kids need built back up after living with an abusive parent who has caused hurt for all of you. Finding the little joys in your day can encourage children to use their strength this way too. Kids like to be helpful. Praise them when they are pitching in.

You and each of your children deserve respect, kindness and safety in your lives!

This publication was supported by a Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) grant award administered by the Ohio Attorney General’s Office. Victims of federal crimes will be served. Provided by The Ohio Domestic Violence Network’s Youth Institute. Contact sonsi@odvn.org
Multi-abuse trauma

- When a person is impacted by multiple, co-occurring issues that negatively affect safety, health or well-being.

The Alaska Network on Domestic Violence And Sexual Assault, Miller and Miller, 2018 NCADV conference
Multi-abuse trauma

- Increases barriers to accessing services
- May lead to further trauma
- May have co-occurring issues

The Alaska Network on Domestic Violence And Sexual Assault, Miller and Miller, 2018 NCADV conference
Advocacy tip #2

Educate survivors on trauma.
Trauma and You

What is Trauma?

People who become victims of a stressful or life-threatening event or accident often experience the event as an emotional shock. Examples of traumatic events include being a victim of a crime, experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault, being abused as a child, surviving a natural disaster, or the death of a loved one. These events are beyond a person’s control, and can happen to anyone. The hallmark of a traumatic experience is that it typically overwhelms an individual emotionally, mentally, and physically. These events can cause feelings of terror, intense fear, horror, helplessness, and physical stress reactions. The ways in which we cope with stressful events are ineffective in the face of traumatic experiences. The impact of these events does not simply go away when the event is over. Traumatic experiences are profound and sometimes can change the way in which people see themselves and the world. Traumatic events can often produce lasting changes in your emotions, your thoughts, and your body’s stress response and how you body feels.

This handout provides information on common reactions to trauma, focusing on the trauma of domestic violence. We hope it will assist you in understanding the way in which your experiences have impacted you, and knowing that these reactions are normal, valid responses. We wish you the best as you move on your journey towards regaining a sense of safety and control over your life and work on healing and moving forward.

Domestic Violence and Trauma

When we experience trauma at the hands of someone we love and trust, it often impacts us profoundly and in many areas of our lives. Domestic violence involves a pattern of coercive and controlling behavior that your partner uses against you to obtain power and control over you and your life. By using such tactics as intimidation, coercion and threats, economic abuse, emotional abuse, and using your children, your partner’s actions might make you feel fearful, powerless, and hopeless, as you struggle to stay as safe as you can in a dangerous situation. Even if you decide to leave the relationship, your partner might still pose a significant risk to your emotional and physical safety, which often means that healing from abusive experiences takes additional time and effort. Yet many victims of domestic violence do heal, and go on to live fulfilling and enriching lives. You can too.
How Do People React to Trauma?

There are three common “clusters” of the body and brain’s response to trauma. They include:

1. Hyperarousal: This refers to the physiological (body) changes that occur in the brains and bodies of trauma survivors, which prepare them to respond to perceived danger. You might feel like you are constantly on the alert for danger, startle easily, and feel like you are “on” all the time. These physical responses can occur weeks, months or years after the event, when a person is reminded of the trauma.

2. Intrusion or re-experiencing events: These symptoms refer to the experience of the trauma “intruding” upon your life after a traumatic event is over. This involves having memories of a disturbing event when you don’t want to or weren’t even thinking about it. This often makes people feel that they aren’t in control.

3. Constriction or avoidance reactions: Often our brain responds to stress by trying to keep us safe through ignoring or avoiding anything related to the trauma. This can include “numbing” of feelings and thoughts connected with the traumatic situation. You might feel the urge to avoid all circumstances associated with the trauma and may withdraw from others as a way of seeking emotional safety.

How Can Trauma Impact Me?

Each person is impacted differently by their experiences with trauma. We do know that trauma can have a huge impact on many areas of your life. Trauma often impacts a person’s ability to control their emotions, make themselves feel better, make decisions, and develop plans. It is very common for victims of domestic violence to feel like their relationship has changed their lives in multiple ways they would have never imagined. Survivors often talk about the ways in which abuse has affected their physical health, mental health, emotional health, feelings about themselves and others, their relationships with loved ones and other people, their spiritual relationships, and their understanding of the world. Trauma often changes people, but we know that survivors of trauma are strong. We know that recovering and healing from traumatic experiences is possible and happens often.

What Can Help Me Heal?

Give yourself some time:

It can take time to recover from traumatic events. It is important to realize that understanding it takes time to heal and process things does seem to help almost everyone. It helps to get some sleep and make sure you are eating and attending to your body’s needs.

Talk about your traumatic experiences:

Telling your story to those who care about you is essential to healing. Breaking the silence about your experiences can be an important means of coping, and will help you process what happened to you.

Re-establish a sense of safety:

Feeling safe is the first step in healing from trauma. Often this begins with regaining a feeling of control over your body. Pay attention to your body’s reactions and think about how you calm down when you are stressed.

Information taken from Victims of Traumatic Events: Handbook, developed by the National Center for Veterans Research and Treatment Center, Trauma Brokers for the Elder Community Health Center, and Trauma Informed Care Best Practices and Protocols from the Ohio Domestic Violence Network at www.odvn.org

NOVA Victim Assistance Academy • 2019
Traumatic stress is:

In the eyes of the beholder
Traumatic reactions are NORMAL responses to ABNORMAL situations.
Advocacy tip #3

Normalize people’s reactions to their experience.
Advocacy tip #4

- Make trauma survivors feel RICH
  - Respected
  - Informed
  - Connected
  - Hopeful
The stress response system

The human brain and body has a built-in alarm system that signals us when we may be in danger.
The Brain:

- **DOING BRAIN**: Limbic system, where response to threat, danger and intense emotions is housed—our “fast” brain

- **THINKING BRAIN**: Cortex, responsible for planning, problem solving, and organizing—our “slow” brain
What happens when you perceive a threat?
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- Flooded with stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol), so your body is ready for emergency action if need be
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- Senses become sharper
What happens when you perceive a threat?

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- Become more externally aware
What happens when you perceive a threat?

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- Heart rate increases
- Blood pressure increases
- Breath quickens
- Senses become sharper
- Become more externally aware
- Lose sense of time, brain gets “dumber”
Why?
Why?

• Increase strength and stamina
Why?

• Increase strength and stamina
• Speed reaction time
Why?

• Increase strength and stamina
• Speed reaction time
• Enhance your focus
Why?

- Increase strength and stamina
- Speed reaction time
- Enhance your focus
- Prepare you to do what you need to do
Why?

- Increase strength and stamina
- Speed reaction time
- Enhance your focus
- Prepare you to do what you need to do

TO GET OUT OF DANGER IF NECESSARY!!
The Stress Response
The Stress Response

Doing brain senses danger
The Stress Response

Thinking brain checks out situation

Doing brain senses danger
The Stress Response

Thinking brain checks out situation

Doing brain senses danger

If there is no danger, the doing brain goes back to normal functioning.
The Stress Response

Thinking brain checks out situation

If there is danger, the thinking brain shuts down, allowing the doing brain to act.

Doing brain senses danger
The Stress Response

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The Stress Response

If there is no danger, the doing brain goes back to normal functioning.

If there is danger, the thinking brain shuts down, allowing the doing brain to act.

From Homelessness Resource Center Traumatic Stress Training Package
The Body is Impacted Too....

Under acute stress, the human brain sends out a cascade of hormones in sequence that alert and prepare the body to freeze, flee or fight.
What is a trauma trigger?

Page 24-25, TIC manual
Triggers

• Reminds us of trauma
• Activate the alarm system.
• Often a false alarm
• Body responds is as if there is danger
• Fight, flight and freeze responses activated.
• Not in the rational part of brain
This can happen....

In your office!
Common Triggers

- Reminders of past events.
- Lack of power/control.
- Conflict in relationships.
- Separation or loss.
- Transitions and routine/schedule disruption.
- Feelings of vulnerability or rejection.
- Feeling threatened or attacked.
- Loneliness.
- Sensory overload.

From Homelessness Resource Center Traumatic Stress Training Package
When someone is triggered

1. Regulate
2. Relate
3. Reason
Advocacy tip #5

Validate

people’s reactions to their experience.
Advocacy Tip #6

Respond: Reflect, Honor, Connect

• **REFLECT** back to them with compassion what you heard.

• **HONOR** their courage for surviving and sharing. (For example, “You have worked so hard to survive. Thank you for sharing with me what happened and what you did to survive.”)

• **CONNECT** them with safety and supports.

Theory to Practice Advanced Learning Community Training Series, Led by Mary Vicario
Healing from trauma

The first goal of trauma recovery should and must be to improve your quality of life on a daily basis.
To heal...

You need to feel safe
Trauma-Informed Approaches: Promising Practices and Protocols

- Introduction
- Understanding trauma
- Responding to trauma
- Best practices
- Protocols
- Vicarious trauma
- Appendices
Resources for Presentation

- Developing Trauma-Informed Practices and Environments: First Steps by Terri Pease

- Dr. Bruce Perry and the Child Trauma Academy
  [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)

- Homeless Resource Center Traumatic Stress Training Package
Check out this website

[Image]

www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org

Under “Resources and Publications”

• Conversation Series
• Tipsheet Series
Thank you!!

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