


The Impact of Societal Stressors on Families & At-Risk Children



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Goals

- *Define Stress, Trauma and Traumatic Events*
- *Identify Expected Responses to Stress and Trauma*
- *Differentiate Reactions in Parents & Children*
- *Identify the Psychological Tasks of Recovery*

WHAT IS TRAUMATIC STRESS?

“psychological injury caused by extreme emotional assault” *(Reber & Reber, 2001)*

“an external event or its intrapersonal repercussions, brought about when the psyche’s protective barrier is immature or has been breached”...very close in meaning to the term ‘crisis’ *(Walrond-Skinner, 1986)*

“**real or imaginary** incidents which occurred during childhood and whose effects crucially influence the individual’s subsequent life and predisposition for coping with stress” *(Freud, 1940)*

TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

- *Experiencing a serious injury to yourself or **witnessing** a serious injury or the death of someone else*
- *Facing imminent threats of serious injury or death to yourself or others*
- *Experiencing a violation of **personal physical integrity**. These experiences usually call forth overwhelming feelings of terror, horror, or helplessness*

EVENTS.....

Natural disasters:

- Hurricanes
- Floods
- Tornados
- Heat Waves
- Fires

Separation from Family (removal)

Sexual Assault/Abuse

Domestic Violence

Homelessness



New Orleans

EVENTS...

Death of a Loved One

Witnessing Death

Secondary Exposure

Motor Vehicle Accidents

Airplane Crashes

Community Loss

Terrorism

Threat of Death

Dismemberment



Drought
Starvation
Threat of
Death

Uganda

War
Mass Violence
Rape, Torture
Murder

CHRONIC TRAUMATIC STRESS

These conditions can be caused by the following:

- *Some forms of physical abuse*
- *Long-standing sexual abuse*
- *Domestic violence*
- *Wars and other forms of political violence*

KEY CONCEPTS ABOUT STRESS AND TRAUMA

- *People will have varying psychological and emotional reactions*
- *Stress and grief are normal reactions to many life circumstances*
- *People pace themselves when dealing with grief, pain, sorrow and loss*

TRAUMA & STRESS REACTIONS

Stress and Trauma affects individuals on four domains:

- Cognitive**-thinking & memory impairment
- Emotional**-depression, anxiety, fear
- Behavioral**-crying, excessive or minimal sleeping/eating, irritable/angry
- Physical**-stomachache, headache, jittery, fatigued, hyper alert

INTRUSIVE REACTIONS

- *Distressing thoughts or images of negative events while awake or dreaming*
- *Upsetting emotional or physical reactions to reminders of negative experiences*
- *Feeling like the bad experiences are happening all over again*

AVOIDANCE & WITHDRAWAL REACTIONS

- *Avoid talking, thinking, and having feelings about negative events*
- *Avoid reminders of negative events (places and people connected to the trauma)*
- *Restricted emotions; feeling numb*
- *Feelings of detachment and estrangement from others; social withdrawal*
- *Loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities*

PHYSICAL AROUSAL REACTIONS

- *Constantly feeling 'edgy'*
- *On the lookout for danger*
- *Feeling jumpy and easily startled*
- *Irritable or outbursts of anger*
- *Difficulty falling or staying asleep*
- *Problems concentrating or paying attention*

RESPONSES IN CHILDREN

Adults often underestimate what children experience, the extent of their reactions and what they need to know

CHILDREN CAN DEVELOP A WIDE RANGE OF DIFFICULTIES

- *Depression*
- *Anxiety*
- *Behaviour problems*
- *Difficulty functioning at home & school*
- *Acting Out*
- *High Risk Behaviour*

RESPONSES IN SOME CHILDREN

- *Regression to younger development stage (bed-wetting, thumb sucking, clinging)*
- *Poor school performance*
- *Acting Out-irritability or argumentative*
- *In teens, promiscuous or adult-like behavior (e.g. taking charge)*
- *Isolation/Suicidal Thinking*
- *Use of alcohol and/or drugs*

RESPONSES IN SOME CHILDREN

- *Impaired concentration*
- *Impaired learning*
- *Aggression*
- *Recklessness*
- *Reduced inhibitions,*
- *Somatic complaints*
- *School refusal*

UNIQUE EFFECTS IN CHILDREN

- *Children can suffer duals responses:*
 1. *The impact of negative events on themselves &*
 2. *the emotional distress of caregivers, parents, teachers & other adults*
- *Adult support is a strong protective factor or*
- *Stress and Trauma-Impacted adults may make at-risk children more vulnerable to developing substance abuse problems*

UNIQUE EFFECTS IN CHILDREN

- *Disruption of child or adolescent development*
- *Interfering in the growth of emotional maturity*
- *Repeated exposure to negative events can affect the child's brain and nervous system*
- *Increased use of health/mental health services*
- *Increased involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems*
- *Increase in high risk behaviors-drug and alcohol use and abuse*
- *Profound long-term consequences*

TRAUMATIC GRIEF RESPONSES IN CHILDREN

- *Children who lose loved ones may develop childhood traumatic grief (CTG)-a condition which compromises child's capacity to negotiate normal grieving process*
- *CTG and the loss of parental support places children at high risk for serious emotional difficulties, major mental health problems including drug and alcohol abuse*

POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Many who experience PTSD symptoms have previous trauma experiences:

- *Physical Abuse*
- *Domestic Violence*
- *Multiple Losses of Loved Ones*

Experiencing a prior trauma does not toughen people up-Instead the effects can add up especially in children

PSYCHOLOGICAL TASKS IN MANAGING STRESS AND TRAUMA

Adult and children alike need to:

- *Regain a sense of mastery and control*
- *Resume age-appropriate roles and activities*
- *Develop a sense of normalcy- create a routine*

THE CHALLENGES OF MANAGING STRESS AND TRAUMA

- *Restoring a sense of safety and trust in the world and the immediate environment*
- *Adaptively expressing feelings and managing those feelings*
- *Grieving losses*
- *Developing a range of constructive coping strategies*
- *Renewing attachments*
- *Finding ways of moving forward*

IMMEDIATE CAREGIVER TASKS

- *Help children understand, name and accept their feelings*
- *Practice and teach children (and parents) skills of:*
 - calming*
 - soothing*
 - tolerating*
 - managing difficult feelings*

CONTINUING CAREGIVER TASKS

- *Affirm that the reactions are normal in the face of extraordinary circumstances*
- *Help people to make sense of the stress they are experiencing-the emotional & behavioral responses*
- *Link children and their families with other helpful agencies, local community supports*

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARENTS

- *Maximize caring and support*
- *Just answer the questions your child asks*
- *Provide sense of safety and security in whatever form you can*
- *Reassure your child that you (adults) are in control*
- *Tolerate regression or need to control*
- *Reinforce their primary role as child/student*
- *Return to routine*

THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITIES

- *Many children find it helpful to write when they are distressed using modalities like pictures, diaries and narratives*
- *Others use: -photography*
-musical expression
-drama/performance

Adults may also use such activities independently to tell their stories

CASE EXAMPLE:

Trauma experts in Oklahoma working with Katrina evacuees monitored rising resentment between host families and evacuee children. An interventionist conducted focus groups to find out what was most important to 'the acting out' children and their families.

They discovered the need to give the evacuee families an opportunity to say 'thank you' which they did through the organization of a class activity of shopping and cooking traditional Southern meals for the host families.

CAUTION

- Therapeutic interventions should be conducted by **trained** workers or therapists*
- Participation should not be mandatory*
- Refrain from probing for feelings*
- When talking about negative events in groups, screen for homogeneity*
- While people may engage in these activities spontaneously, avoid exploring further (unless you are their trained therapist)*

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID

- Do not make assumptions*
- Do not assume anyone is traumatized*
- Do not pathologize, label or diagnoses*
- Do not talk down to distressed parents or their children*
- Do not assume that distressed people want or need to talk to you*
- Do not speculate*

WHAT HELPS	WHAT DOES NOT HELP
Talking to another person for support Spending time with others	Using alcohol or drugs
Engaging in positive distraction Using relaxation methods (sports; hobbies, reading)	Working too much
Participating in group support	Not taking care of self
Getting adequate rest and healthy eating	Extreme avoidance
Exercising in moderation	Anger or violence
Maintaining routines	Excessive TV or computer games
Keeping a journal	Doing risky things
Scheduling pleasant activities	Blaming others
Seeking counseling	
Taking breaks	
Talking about your experiences	

RECOGNIZE RESILIENCE

People are capable of resuming a productive and fulfilling life following negative events if given support, assistance and information at a time and in a manner appropriate to their age, experience, education and culture

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS

- **Psycho-education** -about common reactions stress
- **Supporting the use of effective coping strategies**
- **Stress management**-including relaxation and breathing retraining; distraction
- **Cognitive Interventions**-including cognitive restructuring; challenging negative thinking patterns; restructuring thoughts about negative events and memories; reworking of the narrative

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS

- **Exposure** -including developing a trauma narrative and exposure in vivo;facing distressing memories/events/reminders
- **Skills training** -including social and communication skills; anger management
- **Problem solving skills** -Supporting positive and realistic problem solving skills
- **Parenting Interventions** -to teach and support interventions with children and adolescents
- **Resilience building** -supporting positive coping; setting realistic goals; effective emotion regulation skills

ANNIVERSARIES & TRIGGER EVENTS

- *Mark anniversary dates with memorial activities to further the process of healing, learning and resilience building*
- *Anticipate needing to help families deal with the painful reminders of negative events-plan activities and reduce isolation*
- *There is no 'best way'-ask the individuals what are meaningful rituals to them*
- *Reactions to anniversaries and triggers will vary from person to person*

Resources

- Trauma Focused CBT for Children
<http://tfcbt.musc.edu>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
www.nctsn.org
- National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
www.ncptsd.org
- PFA-Psychological First Aid
- Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit
- Childhood Traumatic Grief Education Materials
- Juvenile Justice Training Materials
