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“And this mess is so big and so deep and so tall, we can not pick it up, there is no way at all.” - Dr. Seuss, The Cat in the Hat

“I am so admiring of you,” I say, authentically, genuinely. “Even though it is hard, you are doing so much to break the cycle of trauma I know has impacted your family for generations.”

I say this because I have heard the parents of this client engage in what I like to call “ the trauma olympics” - “I grew up with this and this and this abuse in my household, my kid doesn’t know how good they have it...”

“Yes,” my client responds. “But between living in my toxic household and experiencing childhood sexual abuse, I just know I will never truly be able to let my guard down. I’ll never be able to fully trust anyone without feeling unsafe.”

This client also happens to be a young person who identifies as transgender.

When I received the request to write this article for the TICC newsletter, I knew I wouldn’t have a shortage of topics to explore. I could trot out the many statistics about how trauma disproportionately impacts LGBTQ+ youth in particular.

However, as I tried in vain to conceptualize a way in to this topic, I couldn’t. For an article such as this, it might be most useful to stick to a specific aspect of trauma for this specific population. What I realized is that especially for this population, and especially now, trauma is everywhere.

Clinically, I see it everyday, in various forms. I see it in the specific life experiences of clients, but also in the structural ways our larger society, and yes, our very field of mental health, perpetuates homophobia and transphobia. Unabashedly and subtly. We - myself, my colleagues, my clients, and members of the LGBTQ+ community at large - are like Jonah in the belly of the whale of trauma.

All encompassing, whale-sized trauma demands a big, bold, unequivocal responses. Change the intake paperwork of your practice or in your agency to ask about sexual orientation and gender identity, even if it makes your cisgender, heterosexual clients feel uncomfortable, so our community can feel seen. Offer a low-cost or no-cost spot in your practice to an LGBTQ+ client, so for an hour a week at least, they can feel safe and understood. You can do so by joining the Out Youth Therapist Network: www.outyouth.org/therapistnetwork.

Finally, see and validate the heck out of the beauty, the resiliency, the sense of humor, and absolute strength of any client who comes to you from our community asking for assistance. Since trauma is a reality at the micro-level and the macro-level, I challenge ALL of us to respond accordingly, so this big mess can feel just a little bit smaller.