

MAKING SENSE OF TRAUMA

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter one's sense of security. The devastating impact emotional trauma has on a child's brain can manifest in illogical behavior, inability to process thoughts, and fear of trusting others. **A mentor can help!** To inform Seedling mentors on the impact of trauma and how they can influence resiliency, our March Training hosted Seanna Crosbie LCSW, Director of Programs and Trauma-Informed Services at Austin Child Guidance Center and Chair of the Trauma-Informed Care Coalition of Central Texas.

Trauma and Its Effect

Witnessing a parent's arrest and being taken away by law enforcement, being physically removed from home and placed with a relative or an unfamiliar foster parent, not knowing why the parent is suddenly absent from his/her life, or the chronic stress of a child in poverty are all emotionally devastating experiences for a child with an incarcerated or deported parent. Abandonment, fear, sadness, confusion, anger and disbelief follow, or on the other end of the spectrum, the traumatic experience can be so overwhelming it causes emotional numbness and an inability to trust anyone.

An emotionally traumatic experience causes the brain to enter into a state of fear-related activation or survival mode: fight, flight or freeze (dissociate). This survival response is hard to unlearn. As a result, when a child who has experienced an emotionally traumatic event in the past feels anxiety in their day to day life, their fear state is triggered. Their "normal" reaction may be impulsivity, withdrawal, forgetfulness, sadness, dissociation, agitation, opposition, or "deer in the headlights" stare. These behaviors and responses can be confusing and seem out of place.

There Is Hope

The good news is that a child's brain is very "plastic" and can change in response to positive experiences. Interventions that restore a sense of safety and control are very important for a traumatized child, promoting resilience or the ability to bounce back from difficult experiences. Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Mentoring is a key example. Relationships that create love and trust provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance to help bolster a person's resilience.

The core value to kids who have experienced trauma is to feel safe. By being a constant, reliable, and accepting presence, you are an anchor for your mentee. Using affirmative self-statements, encouraging their efforts, and acknowledging your mentee's feelings, you are creating happy experiences that can contribute to a healthy brain chemistry and enhance their emotional well-being.

Resources

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm#signs

<http://mentor-center.org/trauma-and-healing/>

Adverse Childhood Experience Study (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>)

Trauma-Informed Care Consortium of Central Texas (www.traumatexas.com)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (<http://nctsn.org/>)

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