

MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19: A DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA PERSPECTIVE

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DISCLOSURES

I have no disclosures to make

AGENDA

- What is developmental trauma?
- Why use a developmental trauma perspective to understand the effects of COVID-19?
- How do I assess for developmental trauma?
- What do I do as provider?
- What do I do as a parent or recommend to my patients' parents?

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENTAL* TRAUMA?

*“Developmental trauma” and “complex trauma” are often used interchangeably to indicate multiple traumas that occur during childhood/adolescence and affect achievement of developmental tasks

- Chronic experiences that are overwhelming and leave a person feeling helpless, vulnerable, or very frightened
- Subjective and developmentally bound
- Multi-layered
 - Overt harm
 - Lack of need fulfilment
 - Interpersonal context
 - Developmental disruption

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA?

- Trauma experienced during childhood/adolescence has a different impact than trauma experienced during adulthood
- Developmental tasks build on one another
- Priority is given to developmental tasks that help the child survive the environment and meet physical, emotional, and relational needs
 - Sensitive threat response
 - Self-protective stance
 - Development of alternate strategies to meet needs

IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON DEVELOPMENT

Self Concept

- Low self-esteem, feelings of shame and guilt, poor body image, lack of sense of self

Cognition

- Trouble paying attention, difficulty processing, challenges in problem solving and future orientation

Biology

- More medical problems than same-age peers, somatic concerns, lower pain perception, poor regulation of bodily functions

Affection Regulation

- Difficulty recognizing, regulating, and communicating internal experience

Dissociation

- Impaired memory, alterations in consciousness, fragmentation

Behavioral Control

- Impulsivity, aggression, oppositional, self-destructive

Attachment

- Difficulty trusting and connecting, unusual ways of engaging in relationships

DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA AND COVID-19

- Chronic experience that has the *potential* to leave someone feeling vulnerable, helpless, and/or very frightened
- May be causing/contributing to overt harm, lack of need fulfillment, attachment disruptions, developmental disruptions
- **Good news!** We know a lot about developmental trauma, how to treat it, and how to build resilience

DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA AND COVID-19

FOR YOUTH WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

- Fewer “eyes on”
- Depletion of protective factors
- Increase of risk factors
- Exacerbation of existing symptoms/behaviors

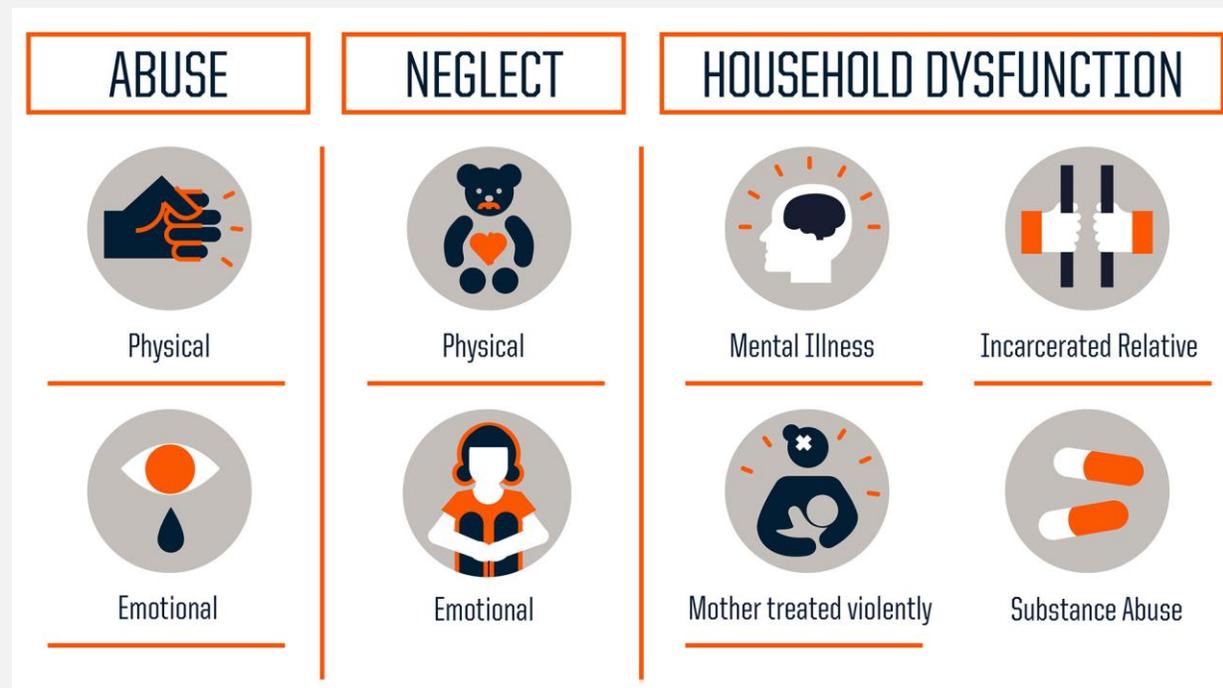
FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE **NOT** EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

- Various aspects of COVID-19/quarantine as sources of trauma
 - Parental stress/depression
 - Job loss/economic instability
 - Exposure to news
 - Loss of family members, friends
 - Separation from caring adults
- Separation from protective factors
- Disruption of developmental tasks

ASSESSING FOR DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA

Changes since February 2020 indicate that COVID-19 may be *one* of the traumatic events contributing to presentation

- Ask caregiver and child separately about “non-traditional” types of trauma
 - Child abuse/neglect AND maternal depression
 - Disruption of attachment relationships
 - How has your family been affected by COVID? What has changed?



ASSESSING FOR DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA

- Assess for areas of development typically affected
 - Concerns about cognition/learning/executive functioning
 - Frequent somatic complaints, developmentally atypical toileting, digestive, or sleep difficulties
 - Dissociation (forgetfulness, inattentiveness, “he becomes a different kid”)
 - Behavioral dysregulation (tearfulness, tantrums)
 - How the child navigates the attachment with you
- Family functioning during COVID-19
 - Changes in energy, biological, or emotional regulation since March
 - Changes in play or other behaviors
 - Changes in parent-child relationship

WHAT DO I DO AS A PROVIDER?

- Continue to track developmental “lags”
- Psychoeducation for parents
- Referral to mental health services if changes are causing distress or being disruptive to family
- Medication to manage symptoms of depression/anxiety
- Assess for and build protective factors



PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks in our lives. It is the way we can prevent stress from causing serious physical, mental and emotional issues. Practicing positive and often simple activities can actually **retrain our brain to be more resilient!**

FOR CHILDREN

-  Positive Role Models
-  Supportive Adults
-  Parental Involvement
-  Caring Community
-  Increased Parent-Infant Contact
-  Increased Knowledge of Child Development

FOR EVERYONE

-  Supportive Relationships
-  Healthy Food
-  Exercise
-  Smile
-  Talk About Feelings
-  Music
-  Art
-  Walk in the Woods
-  Gratitude
-  Positive Thoughts
-  Laugh
-  Hope
-  Volunteer

FOR ADULTS

-  Acknowledge Trauma
-  Seek Support
-  Identify Emotional Triggers
-  Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment
-  Create Safe and Stable Nurturing Relationships

RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

- [Childhood Traumatic Grief for Pediatric Providers](#)
- [MCPAP Mental Health Care Package](#)
- [MCPAP Resources](#)

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Self-Care and Affect Management
 - Use your support systems, take time for yourself, take care of your basic needs, notice when you're especially stressed and use your strategies
- Quality time
 - Create opportunities to engage in positive activities with your child or as a family
 - Attunement activities
- Support emotion regulation
 - Books and TV shows
 - Physical activity
 - Talk
- Seek services if you're really concerned



RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

- [Coping in Hard Times for Parents](#)
- [Supporting Children During Coronavirus](#)
- [Understanding and Coping with Reactions](#)
- [COVID-19 Parenting](#)

QUESTIONS?