Understanding the Impact of Trauma on the Developing Brain

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Forms of Potential Trauma to Children

- Abuse
  - Physical, sexual or emotional
- Neglect/maltreatment i.e.... relational poverty
- Witnessing violence or domestic abuse
- Lack of security and safety in a primary enduring relationship i.e.... attachment

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Factors that Impact Trauma to Young Children

- Often referred to as risk factors
- Family structure
- SES, poverty
- Substance abuse
- Domestic and community violence
- Housing, access high quality preschool, education

It is important to be aware of:

- Situational Risk Factors & Enduring Risk Factors
  - Acute Family Relationship Conflict
  - Acute Life Stress
  - Acute Mental or Physical Wellness Crisis
  - Social Isolation
  - Impaired Caregiver-Child Relationship
  - Everyday Stress
It is important to be aware of:

* Enduring and Underlying Protective Factors:
  - Family Strengths
  - Healthy Coping Strategies
  - Supportive Child-Caregiver Relationships
  - Cultural Roots
  - Economic Stability
  - Community Connections

The Wonderful Brain
Name a few brain responsibilities

Left Hemisphere
- Motor (on the...)
- Language
- Memory creation
- Detail
- Sequence
- Logical thought based on language

Right Hemisphere
- Motor (on the...)
- Emotional Processing
- Memory retrieval
- Spatial manipulation
- Facial Recognition
- Holistic Perception “Gist”
Brain Structures
How does trauma affect the child's brain?

* The child's stress response is exaggerated and prolonged resulting in changes in the child's brain organs
* Larger, more active Amygdala
* Smaller Hippocampus
* Smaller less active Frontal Lobes
* Smaller Corpus Callosum

What Will We See Behaviorally?

**Frontal Lobe Functions**
- Impulse Control
- Organization
- Time Orientation
- Reading Social Cues

**Amygdala Functions**
- Problems w/emotional control
- Delays in cause and effect thinking
- Difficulty w/empathy
- Inability to describe own emotions
- Hyper-arousal, anxiety

**Corpus Callosum**
- Not well integrated having problems using words to solve problems
What Will We See Behaviorally

**Hippocampus Functions**
- Impaired learning
- Less ability to make memories learning
- Less ability to retrieve memories – recall
- More impulsiveness

Abused children often struggle with complex, goals directed behaviors, and have trouble adapting to transitions, changes and demands...

What We CAN do!

**Prevention Strategies**
- Universal, Selected & Indicated
- Prevent precursors of child maltreatment & trauma
- Targeted subset based on risk factors
- Designed for children with diagnosed problems

**Restorative Strategies**
- Safety comes first
- Build self-regulation skills
- Address relational poverty
- Promote enrichment
- Teach stress management
- Play developmental catch-up
- Focus on competency
- Instill HOPE
Public Health Impact of Childhood Trauma

* Child trauma is the single most preventable cause of mental illness
* Single most preventable cause of drug/ETOH abuse in women
* Single most preventable cause of high risk HIV behavior (Iv drug use, promiscuity)
* Significant contributor to leading causes of DEATH
  * Infant mortality, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, suicide

Resources

* Author(s): Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau. DePanfilis, Diane. Year Published: 2006
* [http://www.childTrauma.org](http://www.childTrauma.org)