TRAUMATIC STRESS IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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OVERVIEW

- Trauma, risk, adverse early childhood events, and toxic stress
- Trauma and children’s development
  - How does research inform practice?
- Trauma-informed practice
In its definition of posttraumatic stress disorder, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual uses this definition of trauma: an event or events the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.
Also known as toxic stress, adverse childhood experiences, and cumulative risk

- These may or may not be events that threaten life or limb, e.g. impaired caregiver (substance abuse, mental illness); homelessness

- These events or experiences
  - Tend to pile up and co-occur
  - Have cumulative effects on children’s healthy development – and on subsequent development in adulthood

- BUT, not all events are equal!
Large body of research demonstrates effects of physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect on:

- Social-emotional functioning
  - E.g. trust, judgment, interpersonal decision-making, social skills
- Brain development
  - E.g. stress responses (‘flight or fight’)
- Physical development
- Cognitive development
  - Capacity to learn, problem-solve, etc
RESILIENCE

- Typical development (doing ‘OK’ despite exposure to adversity)
  - “Ordinary magic” (Masten, 2001)

- Longitudinal studies that follow children over many years indicate that resilience is associated with individual and family factors
  - Effective parent or caregiver
  - Child characteristics

- Resilience is a dynamic process, which means it is amenable to intervention
  - E.g. prevention and treatment interventions can put children back on typical developmental trajectories (improving social, emotional, and cognitive functioning, as well as physical health)
Cycle of violence/intergenerational patterns well-established
- Abuse and neglect experienced in childhood is associated with later victimization and perpetration
- Parents who themselves were maltreated may find it harder to parent effectively

Parenting is crucial – parents matter most to their children when circumstances are high
- Effective parenting buffers children from the risks for depression and behavior problems (substance use, antisocial behavior, school dropout, etc)
- Parenting CAN be taught! There is a strong evidence base for parenting interventions in the child welfare system
  - Parent management training-Oregon model/Parenting Through Change
  - Multi-dimensional treatment foster care – preschool/early intervention foster care
PROMOTING SAFETY, PERMANENCY, AND WELLBEING FOR MALTREATED CHILDREN

- Provide services that recognize what children have experienced
  + Train child welfare workforce to identify traumatic stress (what happened to you? Vs. what did you do?)
  + Requires trauma-informed service systems and
  + Evidence-based intervention and prevention services

- Provide children and their parents with the effective services they need
  + E.g. trauma-focused parent training (ADAPT)
    - Kansas child welfare system
  + Trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy
WHAT IS TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE?

- Trauma-informed child welfare system
- Training and supports for workers
- Evidence-based prevention and intervention services for parents and families
- Evidence-based trauma treatment for children
Leadership championing and commitment at all levels of the system
Training for all providers in childhood trauma
  + Core curriculum in child trauma (an evidence-based training curriculum to help workers understand the impact of traumatic stress on children using case-based learning)
Strong collaboration with other child-serving systems
Identification, screening, and assessment of traumatized children
Referrals to effective services
Central Minnesota (four counties) - leadership team from all child-serving systems; training and planning completed, referral mechanisms in place

South East MN Supercommunity – detailed strategic plan in place. CW staff to start training; juvenile justice and Red Wing staff already trained

Ramsey County – lead team in place. Focus on JJ system. All corrections staff to be trained in Jan

White Earth - leadership team, trained over 300 child serving practitioners. Working with Circle of Life Academy to develop a trauma informed school
Ambit Network, in partnership with MN DHS, has provided training to:
- 489 mental health professionals (in 77 agencies)
- who have served over 2800 traumatized children and youth
- Over 3000 ‘front door’ human service professionals in the child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and law enforcement systems have been trained in trauma-informed practice
- Trauma screener is under development for use by front line providers with children
RESOURCES

- Trauma-informed child welfare system: http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/child-welfare-system

- The above links to:
  - Child welfare trauma training toolkit
  - Fact sheets on birth parents and the child welfare system
  - Resource parent curriculum
EVIDENCE-BASED PARENTING RESOURCES

- Parenting resources, examples:
  - Kansas Intensive Permanency project: https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=131&articleid=3335
  - ADAPT for military families
THANK YOU

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- Ambit Network: www.ambitnetwork.org
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network www.nctsn.org