

Beyond Sad and Scared:  
The Real Harm of  
Abuse and Neglect

Presented by  
Katharine Leslie, Ph.D. CFLE  
[www.brandnewdayconsulting.com](http://www.brandnewdayconsulting.com)  
336-376-8366

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Diagnostic Definition of Trauma

- DSM-IV:
  - An event that involves actual or threatened death, serious injury, or threat to physical or psychological integrity of self or other.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

New PTSD Diagnoses (DSM-V)

- PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)
  - Acute Trauma
  - Chronic Trauma
  - Complex Trauma

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Types of Traumatic Stress

(the national child traumatic stress network)

- **Acute trauma** is a single traumatic event that is limited in time. Examples include:
  - Serious accidents
  - Community violence
  - Natural disasters (earthquakes, wildfires, floods)
  - Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
  - Physical or sexual assault (e.g., being shot or raped)
- During an acute event, children go through a variety of feelings, thoughts, and physical reactions that are frightening in and of themselves and contribute to a sense of being overwhelmed.

4 4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Continued

- **Chronic trauma** refers to the experience of multiple traumatic events.
  - These may be multiple and varied events—such as a child who is exposed to domestic violence, is involved in a serious car accident, and then becomes a victim of community violence—or longstanding trauma such as physical abuse, neglect, or war.
  - The effects of chronic trauma are often cumulative, as each event serves to remind the child of prior trauma and reinforce its negative impact.

5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Continued

- **Complex trauma** describes both exposure to chronic trauma—usually caused by adults entrusted with the child's care—and the impact of such exposure on the child.
  - Children who experienced complex trauma have endured multiple interpersonal traumatic events from a very young age.
  - Complex trauma has profound effects on nearly every aspect of a child's development and functioning.

6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Factors Influencing a Child's Experience of Trauma

- Child's age and developmental stage
- The child's perception of the danger faced
- Whether the child was the victim or a witness
- The child's relationship to the victim or perpetrator
- The child's past experience of trauma (severity, chronicity )

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Continued

- The adversities the child faces following the trauma
- The presence/availability of adults who can offer help and protection.
- Child's temperament and resiliency.
- Behavior patterns of the non-offending parent.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Potential Impact of Trauma on Child Development

- Trauma affects each child differently and can produce both short and long term effects.
- Exposure to trauma in-utero and during the first three years of life can be particularly damaging to some or all domains of development: physical, social/emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and moral

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Affects of Stress

- Prenatal Brain
  - Maternal stress hormones pass through the placenta and raise the heart rate and cortisol levels in the unborn fetus.
- Postnatal Brain
  - The infant's brain releases certain neurotransmitters (e.g., opiates, enkephalins, cortisol) that temporarily help the infant cope with stress.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Continued

- Intense surges in stress hormones before and after birth **prevent** integration of key brain functions and
  - neuron cell death
  - dendrite shrinkage
  - warped receptor sites
  - alterations in receptor sites
- Infant's limbic and frontal lobe areas of the brain, responsible for reasoning, emotional responsiveness, and memory are negatively affected.
- Child is in a physiological state of "doing," so as to be prepared to defend, which leaves her mind and body in a perpetual agitated and anxious state.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Results

- Evocative behaviors, as well as feelings of pain, are inhibited.
  - Child's body and mind are conditioned to deny feelings and expressiveness.
- Child experiences homeostasis in fear-induced situations.
- "Doing" without adequate "resting" prevents mastery and creates exhaustion, or inertia and apathy.
- Child does not learn the skills of self-regulation (can't find comfort, pleasure and contentment on one's own and can't modulate emotions).

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Continued

- Child fails to develop social engagement behaviors and self-protective skills (e.g, inability to accurately “read” facial features and movements that would indicate possible danger).
- Energy and aliveness are inhibited or trapped.
- Child feels cut off, disassociated, ungrounded, and weak.
- Child lacks awareness of herself and as a result, a lack of awareness of others (fails to develop boundaries and empathy)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Infants and Toddlers

### Normal Development

### Development Gone Awry

Trust – World is safe

Distrust – World is dangerous

Sensory experience forms healthy schemas

Schemas are negatively skewed toward self protection

Neural pathways created

Brain flooded w/hormones

Increasing self control

Autonomy threatened

Weight gain, exploration

Risk for failure to thrive, cognitive stunting

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Preschoolers

### Developmental Tasks

### Potential Impact of DV

Moderate emotions

Range and expression of emotions compromised

Egocentric, magical thinking

Believe they caused violence or their own abuse

Form schemas of gender roles based on norms

Gender roles associated with stereotypes, victimization abuse

Increased physical independence

Instability, regressive behavior

Moral thinking

Trouble distinguishing right from wrong

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

School-Aged Children	
Developmental Tasks	Potential Impact of DV
Increased emotional awareness	Aware of reactions to violence & impact on others
Increased complexity of thinking (intent)	Adopt rationales for violence
Academic, social success at school affects self-esteem	Learning compromised due to increased vigilance, distractions
Increased same sex ID	Learns gender roles associated with intimate partner abuse
Working towards mastery	May lose motivation to strive toward accomplishing goals

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Adolescence	
Developmental Tasks	Potential Impact of DV
Identity more solidified; interdependence w/family	Identity confused, communication skills and interdependency poor
Views self, others through intra-psychic lens	Maintains shallow relationships to avoid closeness
Increased perspective, problem solving	Immature cognition and levels of empathy
Physical changes of puberty	May try to intervene, use size
Increased peer group influence	Embarrassed by home situation, limited socialization
Dating issues; media	Greater risk of dating violence; more negatively influenced by media

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

In Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposure to repeated stress with no adequate and positive resolution causes permanent biochemical changes in the brain and body that affect behavioral and emotional responses, learning capacity, and social development.</li> </ul>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---