

**AMBIT NETWORK**  
Navigating research and practice in child trauma

---

## Introduction to Traumatic Stress and Trauma Informed Practice

Saprina Matheny, MSW, LICSW  
Ambit Network University of Minnesota  
[www.ambitnetwork.org](http://www.ambitnetwork.org)

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
Driven to Discover NCTSN  
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

## Overview

- ✧ Introduction
- ✧ Trauma Informed Practice
- ✧ What is Trauma?
- ✧ Core Concepts of Trauma
- ✧ Ace Study
- ✧ Secondary Traumatic Stress

*The truth about childhood is stored up in our bodies and lives in the depths of our souls. Our intellect can be deceived, our feelings can be numbed and manipulated, our perceptions shamed and confused, our bodies tricked with medication, but our soul never forgets. And because we are one, one whole soul in one body, someday our body will present its bill.*

Alice Miller

### Ambit Network, University of MN

*Navigating Research and Practice in Child Trauma*

- Established in 2005 as an NCTSN Community Treatment and Services Center through SAMHSA funding. Project Co-Directors: Drs. Abi Gewirtz and Chris Bray
- The MN **National Child Traumatic Stress Network** site ([www.ambitnetwork.org](http://www.ambitnetwork.org) and [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)).
- Purpose: to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and their communities.
- A university-community partnership including a variety of nonprofit, government, and community agencies

## Why Do We Do It

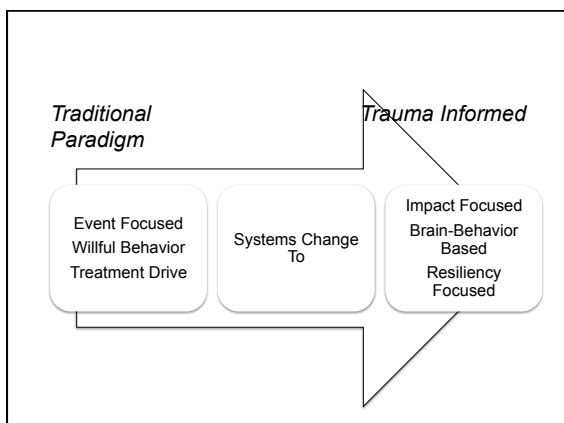
- Over 1 million children will be affected by child abuse and neglect each year.
- \$220 million per day—cost of child abuse and neglect in the US
- \$80 billion to address child abuse and neglect in 2012
- \$63,871= total yearly cost per abused and neglected child

Gelles, R.J. & Perlman, S. (2012). *Estimated Annual Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Chicago IL: Prevent Child Abuse America.

## Why We Care

Child abuse data from 2004-2009: **1,256,000** children maltreated in one yr. (NIS-4, 2010)

In MN, 17,380 reports involving 24, 657 children were abused and neglected in 2010, and 51% were children of color. (DHS, 2009)



???

What is Trauma?

And then What?



## Traumatic Events

- Abuse – Physical, Emotional, Sexual
- Neglect
- Victimization
- Domestic/Community Violence
- Accident/Illness
- Natural Disaster
- War/Terror/Gang Activity
- Removal from Home
- Parental Substance use



## What is Trauma?

The exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence

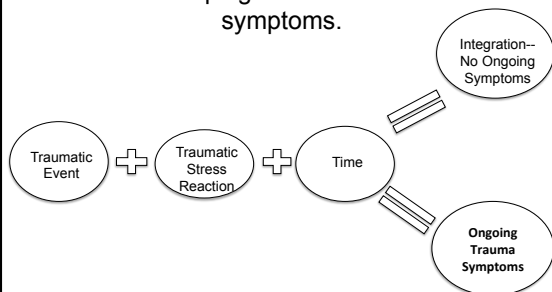
through

- Directly experiencing the event;
- Witnessing the event happen to others;

or

- Learning about traumatic violent or accidental harm to someone close
- Repeated or extreme exposure to details of traumatic events

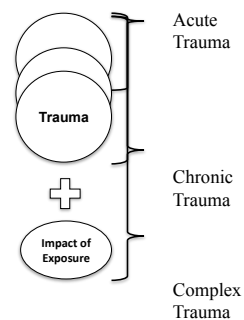
Most people get through adverse experiences without developing traumatic stress related symptoms.



## Types of Trauma

- **Acute trauma** is a single traumatic event that is limited in time
- **Chronic trauma** refers to the experience of multiple traumatic events
- **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

*Sue Hoag-Babeau*



### Core Concept #1

- *Traumatic Experiences are inherently complex.*
  - Events are made up of many moments
  - Subjective reactions to moments
  - Children may want to take actions that they cannot
  - Reactions are influenced by prior experience and developmental level
  - Complexity increases with multiple exposures or primary caregiver is perpetrator

### Factors which determine impact of trauma or loss



### Core Concept #2

- *Trauma occurs within a broad context that includes children's personal characteristics, life experiences, and circumstances.*
  - Child intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors
  - Both influence experience and appraisal of traumatic events
  - Both may serve as vulnerabilities or protective factors

### Core Concept #2

#### • Intrinsic Factors

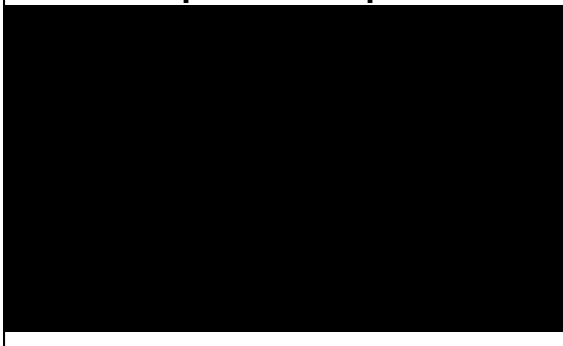


#### • Extrinsic Factors

Environments  
Cultural  
Physical  
Familial  
Community



### Examples of Adaptation



### Core Concept #3

- *Traumatic events often generate secondary adversities, life changes, and distressing reminders in children's daily lives.*
  - Cascade of changes can tax coping resources
  - Create challenges to adjustment and recovery
  - Trauma and loss reminders serve as additional sources of distress
  - May produce fluctuations in trauma survivors functioning

## Trauma Reminders

Sounds, events, situations, sensations, places, people, smells, images that consciously or unconsciously connect with a traumatic event.

### We all have reminders

- Does a memory come into mind, a person or time in your life?
- Do you experience any feelings?
- Do you feel a change in your body, heart rate, or energy level?



## Core Concept #4

- *Children can exhibit a wide range of reactions to trauma and loss.*
  - Vary in onset, nature, intensity, frequency, and duration
  - PTS and grief reactions can develop into psychiatric disorders
  - Disrupt major domains of child development
  - May exacerbate preexisting MH issues

## How Youth Respond to Trauma: Traumatic Stress Reactions

- Intrusion/Reexperiencing/Reenactment
- Hyperarousal/Reactivity
- Negative Mood or Thoughts
- Avoidance
- Dissociation



## Core Concept #5

- *Danger and safety are core concerns in the lives of traumatized children.*
  - Undermine protection and safety, can magnify concerns about danger
  - Ensuring physical safety may not alleviate fears
  - May make it more difficult to distinguish between safe and unsafe situations
  - Ongoing dangerous environments may make recovery more difficult

### Physically Abused Children See Anger Where Others See Fear

Graphic by: Seth Pollak, courtesy PNAS



## Trauma 101 Principle #3



- If we don't look for or acknowledge trauma in the lives of children and adolescents, we end up chasing behaviors and limiting the possibilities for change

### Core Concept #6

- *Traumatic experiences affect the family and broader caregiving systems.*
  - Children are embedded in systems
  - Trauma and loss can impact caregiving systems and disrupt parent-child interactions and attachment.
  - Caregivers own distress may impair their abilities
  - Traumatic events affect overall functioning of community and school systems
  - Need to assess and enhance fx of caregiving systems to effectively intervene

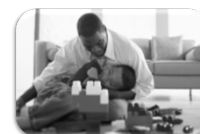
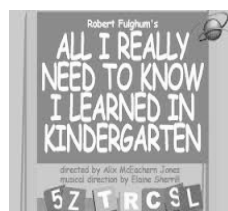
### Core Concept #7

- *Protective and promotive factors can reduce the adverse impact of trauma.*
  - Protective Factors=buffer adverse effects
  - Promotive Factors=enhance positive adjustment
  - May include child intrinsic and extrinsic factors
  - Presence and strength can enhance ability to recover from harmful effects of trauma, loss, and other adversities.

### Core Concept #8

- *Trauma and posttrauma adversities can strongly influence development.*
  - Influence acquisition of developmental competencies and milestones
  - Can lead to developmental regression or acceleration
  - Age, gender, and developmental period are linked to risk for exposure to specific types of trauma.

### The Impact of Traumatic Stress on Child Development



### Development's Missing Stairs



When children endure multiple traumatic events over long periods of time they are especially likely to have multiple gaps in their development.

### Core Concept #9

- *Developmental neurobiology underlies children's reactions to traumatic experiences.*
  - Capacities to appraise and respond to danger are linked to neurobiology
  - Traumatic experiences evoke biological responses
  - Multiple traumatic experiences carry greater risk for neurobiological disturbance
  - Ongoing maturation and neural plasticity create opportunities for recover



In Court, Still Face Experiment: [http://youtu.be/vmE3NB\\_HhE7s-32](http://youtu.be/vmE3NB_HhE7s-32) Development

## We Learn by Experience



## We Learn by Experience



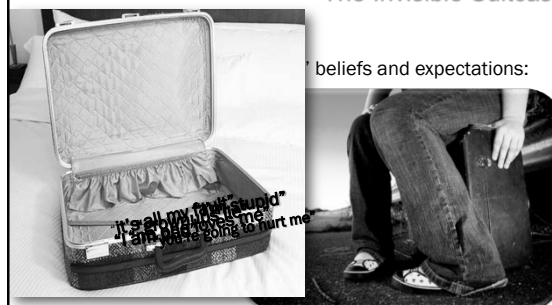
## Core Concept #10

- *Culture is closely interwoven with traumatic experiences, response, and recovery.*
  - *Can affect meaning making*
  - *Influence response*
  - *Historical or multigenerational trauma can affect responses*
  - *Influences rituals and ways that children and families grieve and mourn.*

## Core Concept #11

- *Challenges to the social contract, including legal and ethical issues, affect trauma response and recovery.*
  - *Violation of expectations regarding roles and responsibilities*
  - *The social institutions' response may take time or may not occur*
  - *Perceived success or failure may influence posttrauma adjustment*

## The Invisible Suitcase



### Core Components of Trauma-Focused, Evidence-Based Treatment

- Building a strong therapeutic relationship
- Psychoeducation about normal responses to trauma
- Parent support, conjoint therapy, or parent training
- Emotional expression and regulation skills
- Anxiety management and relaxation skills
- Trauma processing and integration and closure

39

### Take Home Message

Trauma is pervasive

Trauma's impact is broad, diverse and often life-shaping

Providers and practitioners can prevent further traumatization DO NO HARM

Providers and practitioners can help victims to heal

Trauma Informed Practice is cost effective in the long run

### Trauma Resources

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

• [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

National Center for Trauma-Informed Care

• [www.samhsa.gov/nctic](http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic)

DHS Trauma-Informed Care

• [www.dhs.state.mn.us](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us)

National Registry for Evidence-Based Practices

• [www.nrepp.samhsa.gov](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov)

### Trauma Resources

Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

• [tfcbt.musc.edu](http://tfcbt.musc.edu)

Using Trauma Theory to Design Service Systems

• Harris & Fallot

ACE Study


• [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace)

Creating Sanctuary in Schools Bloom, S.

• [www.Sanctuaryweb.com](http://www.Sanctuaryweb.com)

Child Trauma Academy

• [www.childtraumaacademy.com](http://www.childtraumaacademy.com)



**AMBIT NETWORK**  
Navigating research and practice in child trauma

**Contact Information**

Chris Bray, Ph.D., L.P.  
bray0021@umn.edu

Saprina Matheny, MSW, LICSW  
smatheny@umn.edu

Ambit Network, University of Minnesota  
612-624-3748  
Ambitnetwork.org

