

Discussing Issues of Sexuality with a Trauma Survivor

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HEALTHY TEEN NETWORK
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Disclaimer

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President/ CEO, Healthy Teen Network

Objectives

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- **By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:**
 - Recognize the extent and types of trauma experienced by young people;
 - Identify the impact of trauma on the developmental milestones and decision making behaviors of youth;
 - Describe at least four strategies to help youth overcome trauma, and
 - Practice trauma informed approaches through case study.



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BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITY

What is Trauma?

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What is Trauma?

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- Exposure to multiple distressing events with long term impact outcomes
- An event more overwhelming than a person ordinarily would be expected to encounter
- Typically results when a child is abused or neglected and through various events such as witnessing domestic violence, ethnic cleansing, or war

Types of Trauma

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- **Acute trauma** – single event that lasts for a limited period of time.
- **Chronic trauma**- Recurrent traumatic events of the same kind over an extended time-span.
- **Complex trauma**- both exposure to chronic trauma—usually caused by adults entrusted with the child’s care—and the impact of such exposure on the child.

Types of Trauma

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- **Abuse**
 - Emotional Abuse
 - Physical Abuse
 - Sexual Abuse
- **Neglect**
 - Emotional Neglect
 - Physical Neglect
- **Household Dysfunction**
 - Mother treated violently
 - Household substance abuse
 - Household mental illness
 - Parental separation or divorce
 - Incarcerated household member

The Numbers

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Prevalence of Trauma

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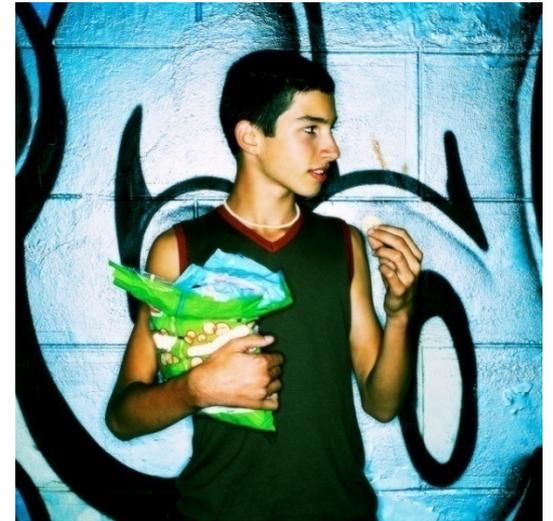
- In the United States alone, approximately five million children experience some form of traumatic event each year.



Prevalence of Trauma

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- By the time a teen reaches the age of 18, the probability that he or she will have been touched directly by interpersonal or community violence is approximately 1 in 4.



Prevalence of Trauma

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- **70 to 90% of people will be exposed to a traumatic event at some time in their lives.**
- **By age of 11, 11% of youth have experienced a traumatic event.**
- **By age of 18, 43% of youth have experienced such an event.**

Symptoms of Trauma

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Response to trauma

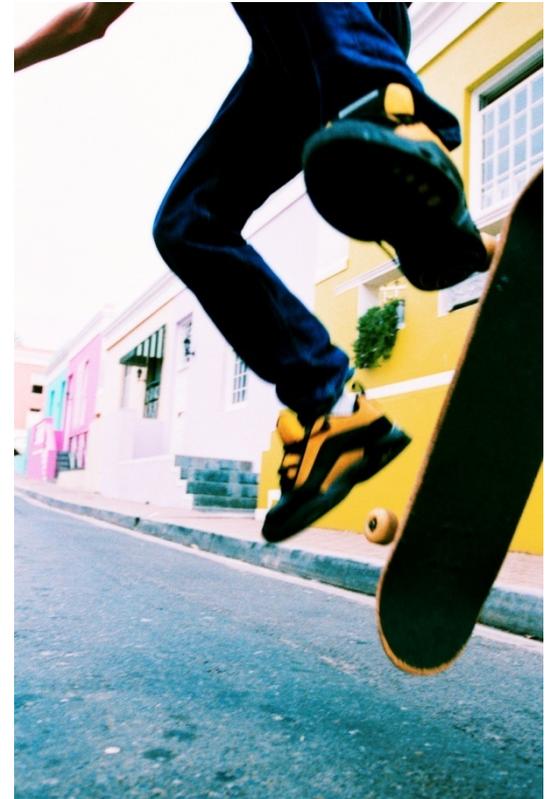
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- Every child reacts differently according to:
 - The child's age and development stage
 - Child's basic temperament
 - How the child perceived or understood the danger
 - The child's past experience with trauma
 - "Life" after the trauma
 - Availability of adults who can offer help, reassurance, and protection

Symptoms of Trauma

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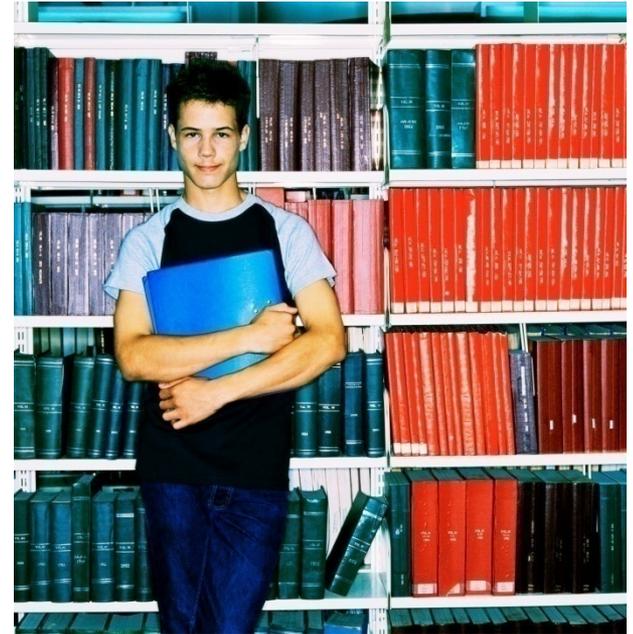
- **Hyper arousal:**
 - Jumpy
 - Nervous
 - Quick to startle



Symptoms of Trauma

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- **Avoidance and withdrawal:**
 - “Numb” feelings
 - Frozen
 - Shut down
 - Separated from normal life
 - Pulls away from activities that they normally enjoyed



Symptoms of Trauma

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- **Re-experience:**
 - Images
 - Sensations
 - Memories of the traumatic event keep coming up in the child's mind



Behaviors

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- Children who have been sexually abused may act out in sexual ways:
 - May use vulgar language
 - Make frequent reference to sex
 - May appear to be very savvy and sexually experienced

Impact and Effects of Trauma

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Impact of Sexual Abuse

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- Sexual abuse can alter perceptions about sexual behavior and influence judgment in forming intimate relationships, and thereby lead to:
 - earlier sexual debut,
 - more sexual partners, and
 - an increased risk of sexual violence in intimate relationships.

Impact of Emotional Abuse

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- Depression
- Estrangement
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Inappropriate or troubled relationships
- Lack of empathy



Impact of Witnessing Abuse

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- Increased risk of:
 - Depression
 - Hopelessness
 - Low self-esteem
 - Higher risk of problems with future intimate relationships



Effects of Trauma on Development

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Effect on Childhood Development

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- **Children (ages 6-12) should be able to:**

- Manage fears, anxieties, aggression
- Focus their attention on learning and problem solving
- Control their impulses and manage physical reactions to perceived dangers.

- **w/ Trauma:**

- Experience mood swings
- Difficulties in school and tough learning situations
- Have specific anxieties and fears (dark)
- Demand a lot of attention
- Revert to younger behaviors such as baby talk or wanting adults to feed or dress them or bed wetting

Effect on Adolescent Development

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- **Adolescent milestones:**

- Abstract thinking
- Imagine future and anticipate and consider the consequences of their behaviors
- Make realistic appraisals of what's dangerous and safe
- Alter their current behaviors in order to meet their longer-term goals

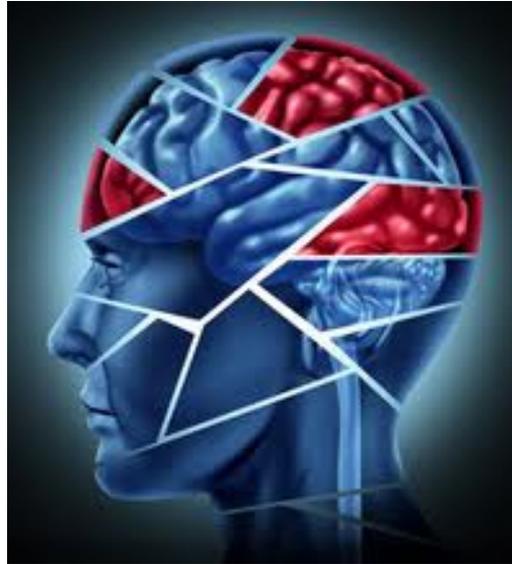
- **w/ Trauma:**

- Have difficulty planning for future
- Have trouble accurately assessing risk- either over or underestimating the danger of a situation or activity
- Engage in aggressive or disruptive behaviors
- Engage in reckless or self destructive behaviors

How to Identify Survivors Among Your Priority Populations

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- Use the trauma lens
- Screen/assess for trauma – ask the question



Strategies for Helping Youth Overcome Trauma

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Things You Can Do to Address Trauma

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- Promote within your program :
 - **A sense of safety** (psychological) – ask the youth when they come to the program what makes them feel safe
 - **Calming** – incorporate relaxation exercises or other activities to help the youth relax and calm their bodies

Things You Can Do to Address Trauma

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- **Sense of self- and collective efficacy** – incorporate skill-building activities, provide many opportunities for the youth to have choices
- **Connectedness** – activities to help develop relationships

Things You Can Do to Address Trauma

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- **Hope** – activities that help the youth know that they are more than their traumatic experiences
- **Information and/or education** about how others have been able to get beyond

Things You Can Do to Address Trauma

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- **Build on good practices** – assume a history of trauma when creating/adapting protocols
- **Understand triggers** – know the age when trauma took place to understand where each youth is developmentally and have this as part of your intake assessment tools

Things You Can Do to Address Trauma

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- Focus on building resilience by integrating positive youth development approaches and reinforcing positive behaviors/skills
- Assess your program for trauma-focused approaches and adapt as you can



Keeping it Simple

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- **Don't make assumptions.**
 - Remember youth of all ages, size, ethnicities, genders and socio-economic classes can experience trauma.

- **Assess for trauma as part of your normal history.**
 - Assess everyone. Use clear and direct but non-threatening questions.

Keeping it Simple

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- **Be aware of red flags, such as repeat STIs, unintended pregnancy, irregular use of contraception, adversity to exams, etc.**
- **Know where to get additional services in your community.**

Tips for Talking with Youth

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Discussing Issues of Sexuality with a Trauma Survivor

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- Can bring up feelings of shame and/or degradation
- Talk often and early, keeping conversations short
- Listen closely, offering guidance and info, not judgment
- Tell youth that talking about these things is normal

Discussing Issues of Sexuality with a Survivor of Abuse

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- Use appropriate language to normalize sexual discussion
- Give youth permission to talk about sexual matters
- Tell youth that talking about sex is an important part of your role

Discussing Issues of Sexuality with a Survivor of Abuse

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- If youth is anxious about talking directly about themselves, use experiences of “someone” you know
- Use language that generalizes (“some kids feel”... “I’ve heard that kids who have been abused feel or wonder”...)



Time to Practice

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Time to Practice

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- You have a 16 year old male after school program participant who appears to be intoxicated. This participant has been the leader of the after school program group for about 1 year and you have grown close to the participant. Over the last 6 weeks, he has been coming to the program appearing to be under the influence of either drugs or alcohol, rowdy, and being sexually vulgar towards the other participants.

Guiding Questions

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- How would you approach the participant?
- What symptoms of trauma is this participant displaying?
- What do you think can be some trauma triggers for the participant? How can you avoid this participant from escalating?
- How would you assess the stability of this participant before or during the program?
- As an educator- what services would you offer the participant?

Resources

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- www.nctsn.org
- www.healthyteennetwork.org
- www.futureswithoutviolence.org
- www.childwelfare.gov

Contact Information



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