

Children with Trauma & Attachment Disturbances:

A Beginner's Guide In Healing the Most Challenging Children

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Shirley Crenshaw, MSW, LCSW:

- Child Welfare Worker: 28 years
- MSW, Washington University in St. Louis, 1995
- Psychotherapy, 17 years

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What is Attachment?

- The ability to trust and form reciprocal, healthy, and authentic relationships.
- It gives us the ability to regulate our emotions, have a conscience, and experience empathy
- It is the corridor to all development, including motor skills, endorphin production, neurological, physiological, and psychological development
- Develops in 1st 3 years
- Template of all future relationships. Gives us the ability to seek safety in relationships.

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Trauma

Stress that can be:

Overwhelming
Unpredictable
Prolonged

Creates:

Helplessness/Hopelessness/Powerlessness

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Trauma

- Interferes with normal development
- Interferes with memory processing
- Memories often not accessible to conscious
- Memories easily triggered by sensory clues/emotions (easily dysregulated)
- Flashbacks/dissociation/hypervigilance/nightmares
- Continual state of alarm/anxiety (effects on immune system)
- Inability to manage/regulate emotions/lacks coping ability (leads to addictions- relational substitutes)

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How do attachment problems start?

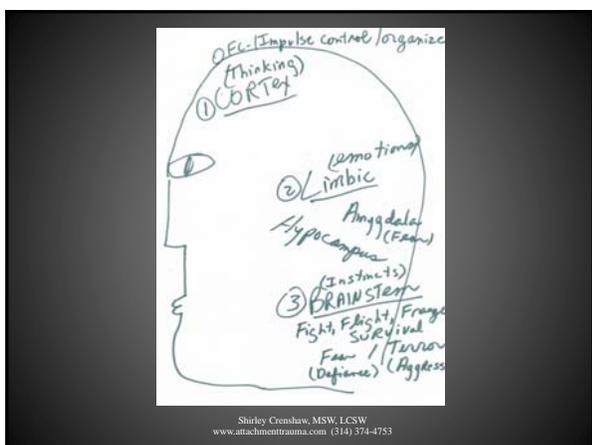
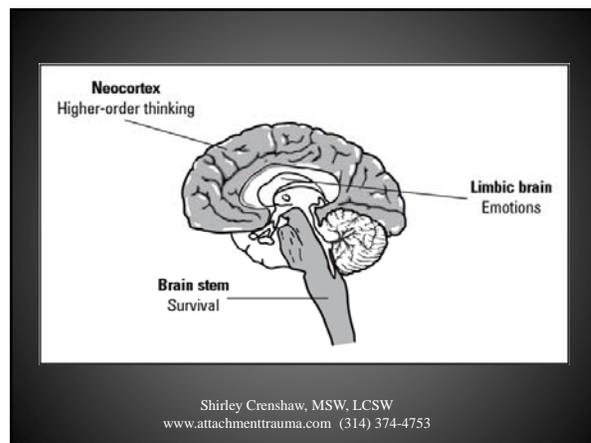
- Early trauma, abuse, or neglect (Implicit vs. explicit memory)
- Acts of Omission (neglect) has a much more negative effect on children than acts of commission (J. Briere)
- Early hospitalizations and/or medical procedures/unrelieved pain (colicky, ear, etc)
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

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- Domestic violence/stressors during pregnancy
 - Multiple placements/caregivers/institutionalization
 - Post-partum depression
 - Environmental Stressors (includes poverty)
 - Parents with their own unresolved trauma/attachment issues (role reversal)
 - Parent's drug/alcohol addictions
 - Crying it out (young infants)
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- ### Relationship Trauma:
- Gut wrenching sadness when separated from caretaker (J. Briere)
 - Research shows psychologically unavailable caretakers that cannot maintain positive connection with their children have much worse outcomes. We are wired to be dependent. (J. Briere)
 - Relationship schema: Being close to people hurts – they will betray you and hurt you.
 - Addictions are chemical substitutes for secure attachments
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- ### Effects of early relationship trauma
- Lack of Trust – leads to pseudo-independence/emotional isolation. Unable to use caregiver as source of comfort/gratification. Seeks external sources of regulation (addictions)
 - Shame – Developmentally egocentric
 - Arrested emotional development /conscience development
 - Object permanency/constancy
 - Neurology and Physiology (Stinky Foot Syndrome- S. Crenshaw)
 - Easily dysregulated/hyperaroused (looks like ADHD)
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- ### Gabor Mate, M.D.:
- The fewer endorphin-enhancing experiences in first years of life, the greater need from external sources.
 - What sets addicts apart is the extreme degree of stress they had to endure early in life.
 - Stressed, anxious, or depressed parents have great difficulty initiating enough of those emotionally rewarding, endorphin-liberating interactions with their children.
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Traumatized children often.....

- Try to control others
- Show too much or too little affection
- Refuse to cooperate
- Can be overly friendly/charming with strangers
- Lack empathy for others and self
- Lack cause/effect thinking
- Chatter non-stop(Bessel v.d. Kolk)
- Can't keep friends
- Lack eye contact

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- Isolate themselves emotionally
- Demonstrate pseudo-independence (lack trust)
- Lie (fear of rejection/abandonment if make mistakes)
- Steal
- Hoard food
- Fear failure (have to be perfect – or perfectly bad)
- Fear of trusting happiness– lacks positive (as well as negative) affect tolerance

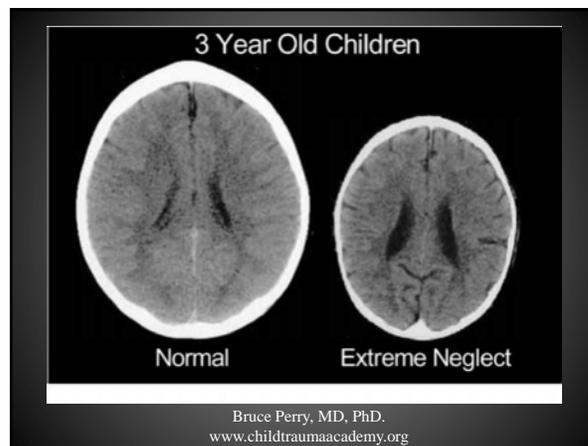
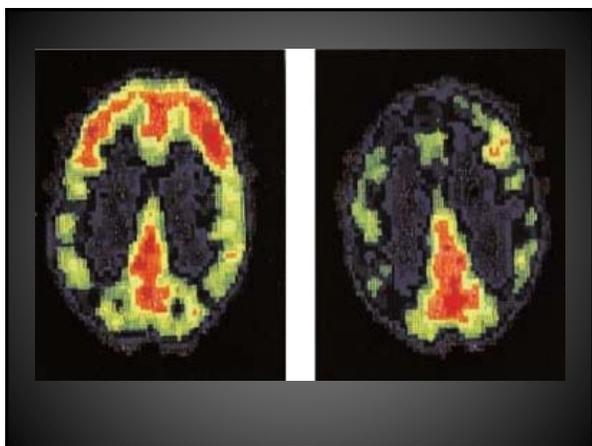
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- Hurt others/self
- Seek attention inappropriately (feel invisible)
- Lack intersubjectivity (ability to reflect on other's experiences) (D. Hughes)
- Have black/white thinking
- Never believe they will have enough
- Assume parents' motives are negative
- Have tension reduction behaviors/addictions (trichotillomania, cutting, rocking, thumb-sucking, excessive masturbation, etc.)

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Sense of Time	Extended Future	Days Hours	Hours Minutes	Minutes Seconds	No Sense of Time
Arousal Continuum	REST	VIGILANCE	RESISTANCE Crying	DEFIANCE Tantrums	AGGRESSION
Dissociative Continuum	REST	AVOIDANCE	COMPLIANCE	DISSOCIATION	FAINTING
Regulating Brain Region	NEOCORTEX Cortex	CORTEX Limbic	LIMBIC Midbrain	MIDBRAIN Brainstem	BRAINSTEM Autonomic
Cognitive Style	ABSTRACT	CONCRETE	EMOTIONAL	REACTIVE	REFLEXIVE
Internal State	CALM	AROUSAL	ALARM	FEAR	TERROR

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- ### Defenses (I must protect myself)
- Defiance
 - Lying
 - Stealing
 - Sibling Rivalry
 - Dissociating
 - OCD
 - Denial of Affect
 - Substitute affect/machismo
 - Controlling
 - Pseudo-independence
 - Anger (hides fear/shame)
 - Aggression
 - Running away
 - Push away behavior
 - Triangulation
 - Vulnerability = Danger
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- ### Calming the Fears (Calmer amygdala calms the more activated amygdala)
- PLACE (Dan Hughes) www.danielhughes.org
- Playfulness
 - Love
 - Acceptance (Unc. Love)
 - Curiosity (tell me more)
 - Empathy (match affect)
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- ### Identifying Affect as a Part of Self-Regulation
- Unable to identify feelings
 - Can't feel their internal states – avoidance strategy – leads to addictions
 - Constantly externalize (reality is what other people think) (relationship to shame)
 - If you can't identify your feeling, more trouble self-regulating
 - Identify and verbalize feelings
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- ### Therapeutic Home Environment
- High Supervision=safety
 - High Nurture/snuggling/feeding/massage/hugs/rocking, stories/reading (if sexually abused discuss) – Min. 2 hours per day (Keck & Kupecky)
 - Empathy/Curiosity
 - Identify feelings
 - Limits (overindulgence hurts)
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Therapeutic Home Environment

- Beyond Behavior Charts/Time outs
- One way trust
- Not taking behaviors personally
- MeMoves, BrainGym, HeartMath, Wild Divine, mirroring, Mini-trampoline, Pogo Sticks, getting wiggles out
- No arguing with child
- No blackmail allowed (giving in to keep peace)

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Therapeutic home

- Lifebook
- Alternatives to “NO”
- Eliminate correction, criticism, threats, negative input, punishments, anger, irritation, annoyance
- Transitional objects at home and at school
- Staying out of homework concerns (units of concern – Levi and Orlans)
- Limit choices (overwhelms)-developmental age
- Limit electronics: Video games elevate stress

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Therapeutic Home

- Laughter/creating fun (most important!)
- Board games, card games, cooking together --- **increased positive interaction with child!!!**
- Limit praise – no arguing with child’s idea that he is bad/stupid – cognitive dissonance
- Prescribing symptom (paradoxical interventions)
- Parent Support Group (www.attach.org)

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Therapeutic Home

- Less transitions (includes vacations)
- No isolation – Time Ins/no time-outs
- Safety: Child wants you to contain their anger/aggression.
- Background music (relaxation music)
- Breathing (rocking the teddy bear – A.Gomez)
- Essential oils (lavender/vanilla/peppermint)
- Diet

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Family Therapy

- Creating Coherent Narrative (to reduce shame and make sense of fears, defenses, and behaviors) & Claiming Narrative (D.Wesselmann, J. Lovett, H. Forbes, M. White, J. May)
- Role Play
- Mirroring exercises
- Theraplay
- Drumming and other bottom-up therapies

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EMDR in Family Therapy

- EMDR for PTSD in Parents
- EMDR for children’s life story (puppy story).
- EMDR for children’s alternate life story
- EMDR for parent establishing empathy for the child
- EMDR for neg. cognitions

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- ATTACH.org “White Paper”: Physical restraint is only used when safety is compromised
- More troubled the child, the closer the supervision (grabbing distance) – helps child feel safe
- Take the child out of school if possible – more time for making a connection
- Psychotropic meds can sometimes make the child worse. Ritalin (stimulants) can repress play (Gomez)

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EMDR (Francine Shapiro-2001)

- EMDR has been found effective in changing attachment status (D. Wesselmann, M. Potter)
- When events are too overwhelming, the information processing system shuts down and memory (and affect) is stored maladaptively in the brain’s neural network.
- Unprocessed material is triggered by a situation, person, event, sound, smell (any of the senses), accessing the same beliefs, emotions, and sensations present in the past. This drives the child’s behaviors.

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EMDR (con’t)

- EMDR involves bilateral stimulation for strengthening resources and desensitizing emotions related to trauma.
- EMDR integrates the maladaptively stored material (in limbic part of the brain) with adaptive material in the cortex).
- Current triggers, traumatic events, and negative beliefs become targets for EMDR therapy.
- Bilateral stimulation may activate the same centers in the brain that are active during REM sleep (Stickgold, R., 2008).

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