Trauma, PTSD, Complex Trauma, and the ARC Framework
Learning Objectives

• What do we mean when we use the term trauma?
• What do different types of traumatic events have in common?
• Why do people respond differently to the same traumatic event?
• What do we mean by the term PTSD?
• What is “Complex Trauma?”
• How is Complex Trauma different from PTSD and how is it the same?
• Eight Domains of Impairment
• ACES Study
What are some examples of "traumatic events?"

• Military combat
• Violent assault
• Witness to violence
• Natural disaster
• Automobile accident
What do these events have in common?

- The event is unexpected
- The victim was unprepared for the event
- There wasn’t anything the person could do to prevent the trauma
- The person experienced intense fear, helplessness and horror
What was Dorothy’s trauma?
What was Harry’s Trauma?
Why do some people respond differently?

- Pre-event factors
- Event factors
- Post-event factors
- Personal characteristics
Pre Event Factors
Negative Pre-event Factors

- Previous exposure to trauma or child abuse
- Ineffective coping skills
- Previous Mood or Anxiety Disorders
- Family Instability
- Family History of Criminal Behavior
- Trouble with authority
- Absence of social support
- Age at the time of the event--- under age 25
Event Factors
Event Factors

• Geographic nearness to the event
• Level of exposure to the event
• The event’s meaning to the victim
• Being a victim of multiple traumatic events
• Duration of the trauma
• The existence of an on-going threat
Post Event Factors
Negative Post Event Factors

• The absence of social support
• Indulging in self-pity
• Not being able to do something about what happened
• Being passive rather than active
• Inability to find meaning in the suffering
Personal characteristics that help us cope

- Internal Locus of Control
- Self-efficacy
- Sense of coherence
- Strength (physical and emotional)
- Motivation to deal with the trauma
- Optimistic attitude
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD

Diagnostic Criteria:

• Re-experiencing the event
• Avoiding the stimuli and numbing of responsiveness
• Increased arousal
Re-experiencing the Event

- Recurrent images and thoughts
- Recurrent and distressing dreams
- Reliving the experience (flashbacks)
- Distress at exposure to cues that symbolize the traumatic event
- Physiological reactivity
Avoidance and Numbing

- Efforts to avoid thoughts and feelings
- Efforts to avoid activities, places or people
- Inability to recall important aspects of the trauma
- Diminished interest in activities
- Feeling detached from others
- Restricted range of affect
- Sense of foreshortened future
Increased Arousal

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hyper-vigilance
- Exaggerated startle response
What is Complex Trauma?

- Complex Trauma describes the dual problem of children’s exposure to traumatic events and the impact of this exposure on immediate and long-term outcomes.
- This exposure often occurs in the care giving system and social environment that are supposed to be a source of stability in a child’s life.
- This on-going exposure to traumatic events often leads to subsequent traumatic exposure.

(NCTSN “Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents” White Paper 2003).
Examples of Complex Trauma

- Childhood abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect)
- Frequent change of caregivers
- Witness to domestic violence
- Victim of gang or street violence
- Homelessness
Complex Trauma vs. PTSD

- Complex Trauma refers to multiple and ongoing stress, primarily experienced in childhood and adolescence.
- The impact of complex trauma may not mirror the symptoms of PTSD,
- A diagnosis of PTSD may result from a single event at anytime in the lifecycle.
- A diagnosis PTSD is limited to specific symptom criteria, including re-experiencing, avoidance, and increased arousal.
The ARC Framework

Focusing on the impact of trauma in these domains:

• Attachment
• Self-Regulation
• Competencies
Attachment

“Positive attachment is the capacity to form and maintain a healthy emotional bond with another person or persons which is a source of mutual comfort, safety, and caring.”
Challenges to Positive Attachment...

- Suspicious of others; preoccupied with perceived threats
- Defiant and/or aggressive towards peers, caregivers or other adults
- Non-discerning in making friends or sharing information
- Unaware of their own emotions
- Not attuned to others’ emotions
- Avoids asking for help or communicating needs
- Needy and demanding behavior
- Allows oneself to be victimized by others
- Isolative behavior
- Engages in loud attention seeing behavior
- Inappropriate attempts to gain intimate contact;
“Self-Regulation refers to developing and maintaining the ability to notice and control feelings such as frustration, anger and fear.”
Challenges to Self-Regulation…

• Hypersensitivity to physical contact
• Hyper vigilance – overreacts to perceived threats or danger
• Hyper arousal – feeling tense, on edge, easily startled, difficulty sleeping or having angry outbursts
• Somatization – experiencing emotional stress in one’s body
• Inability to be in the moment or to be “mindful”
• Disturbances in regulation of bodily functions – sleeping, eating and digestion.
“Developmental skill competency refers to mastering the developmental tasks of adolescence and developing the ability to plan and organize for the future.”
Challenges to Competency

- Pessimistic and hopeless outlook
- Lacking a sense of meaning or purpose in life
- Perceptions of self:
  - Low sense of self-efficacy (inability to complete necessary tasks within one’s environment)
  - Low self-worth (not worthy or deserving of love, attention, help, etc...)
- Difficulties in the following:
  - Focusing on the task at hand
  - Planning and future oriented thinking
  - Realizing consequences for one’s actions
  - Setting realistic, achievable goals
- Examples of Developmental Skill Deficiencies:
  - Budgeting and banking;
  - Shopping and cooking
  - Completing job applications and interviewing
Special Populations

- LGBT youth
- Youth of color
- Immigrant youth
- Gang involved youth
- Other populations
Why is it helpful to use “trauma” as a lens to gain a perspective on the youth we serve?

- Builds empathy
- Normalizes their behavior and presentation
- Comprehensive and flexible
- Other reasons?