Toward Trauma Informed Juvenile Justice Systems
Definitions, Pros & Cons

Julian D. Ford, Ph.D.
University of Connecticut School of Medicine
jford@uchc.edu
Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

- 60-90% estimated to have trauma histories
  - Girls: 33-50% have been sexually assaulted/abused
  - Both Genders: ~50% have been traumatically assaulted
  - 40+% are Poly-victims (multiple TYPES of trauma)

- 10-27% in U.S., 33-37% in Australia, Japan develop *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD)
  - Girls = Boys in risk of developing PTSD
  - PTSD 2 to 8 times greater prevalence than for youth who are not involved in the Juvenile Justice System
Types of Potentially Traumatic Victimization

- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Bullying
- Dating Violence
- Witness to Murder
- Community Violence
- Hate Crimes
- War
- Torture
- Terrorism
- Rape/Sexual Coercion
- Kidnapping
- Assault/Mugging
- Robbery
- Ethnic Cleansing
- Property Destruction
- Witness to Family Violence
Forms of Post-Traumatic “Survival Coping”

- Reactive Aggression
- Delinquency
- Delinquent Peer Affiliations
- School Problems/Failure
- Impulsivity
- Oppositionality-Defiance
- Withdrawal/Isolation
- Addictions
- Non-suicidal Self-harm
- Reckless/Extreme Risk Taking
- Unresolved Grief
- Suicidality
- Depression
- Panic
- Obsessions/Compulsions
- Sexual Problems
- Eating Problems
- Sleep Problems
- Self-blame/hatred and Shame
- Hopelessness
The Toll that Post-Traumatic Survival Coping Takes on Poly-victimized Children’s Lives

• Hypervigilance (Distrustful/On Edge)
• Reactive Aggression (Toward Self or Others)
• Hopelessness (Masked as Indifference)
• Withdrawal (School, Family, Peers, Community, Society)
“Pros” of Trauma-Informed Services for Juvenile Justice Systems?

• **Universal precautions** (before survival coping becomes permanent way of life) for:
  - Youths, Families, Entire Communities
  - Adults in the System Affected by Vicarious Trauma

• **Anticipatory Guidance**: Practical knowledge & skills to regain/sustain safe/respectful conduct
  – By Youths and Families
  – By Adults Working In/With Juvenile Justice System
The Brain Under Normal Stress

The Thinking Center (prefrontal cortex)

Filing Center (hippocampus)

Alarm System (amygdala)
normal stress
The Brain & Body Working Together

the brain

the nervous system

Alarm System
(amygdala)

Filing Center
(hippocampus)

Thinking Center
(prefrontal cortex)

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extreme stress / trauma

The Alarm Takes Control

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First Step to Re-Setting the Brain’s Alarm: SOS (Mental Focusing)

• **Step I: Stop, Slow Down, Sweep Your Mind Clear**
  – Notice how your body feels as you breathe in and out
  – Let your mind be a river that carries every thought away

• **Step II: Orient Yourself**
  – Focus your mind on just one thought that you choose
  – The hope, goal, or relationship that you value most in your life

• **Step III: Self Check Your Level of Alarm and Focus**
  – How Much Stress? How Much Focused Personal Control?
Resources for Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice Systems

- University of Connecticut/National Child Traumatic Stress Network Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice
  http://www.nctsn.org/content/university-connecticut-school-medicine-center-trauma-recovery-and-juvenile-justice

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network “Think Trauma” Toolkit and Workforce Training Curriculum for Juvenile Justice Programs

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network “Trauma-Informed Judge’s Bench Card
  http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/judge_bench_cards_final.pdf
Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice Systems: “Cons”

• Iatrogenic/Unintended Harm of Assessment and Treatment: trauma screening/assessment must be followed by safe/appropriate services

• Prosecution: trauma history or symptoms could be used against the youth in court decisions

• Economics: educating/equipping personnel & supervisors with knowledge/skills takes time