Overview of Trauma-informed Care

RESPONDING TO TRAUMA IN A WAY THAT DOES NOT PATHOLOGIZE CHILDREN

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THREE BRANCH INSTITUTE ON CHILD WELL-BEING

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Introductions

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See bio for more information
Anu’s Mission

We create permanent connections to loving and stable families.
A Fundamental Shift...

We are undergoing a fundamental shift in child welfare in our country which is moving away from the old way of diagnosing, medicating, and blaming victims to creating safe and permanent spaces for youth who are survivors of trauma to heal and work through their grief and loss.
When we know better...

...we must do better

Diagnosing
Medicating
and “Treating” youth

has not yielded desired results.
Are the kids better off?

We spend $26 billion per year in the US medicating and treating our youth, and ask anyone who does the work...

are the kids in out-of-home care better or more challenging than they used to be?
What we have to talk about today is URGENT.

Childhood is brief, and is a rare opportunity to shape a lifetime.
In 6 months, the ties that bind us begin to fray...
Grief & Loss

IN CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA
Loss

- Are normal experiences
- Happen nearly every day
- Happen to everyone
- Can be big and/or small
- Are given meaning by the griever
Children experience trauma which result in losses which must be grieved.

-Darla Henry
"The most traumatic aspects of all disasters involve the shattering of human connections."

~Dr. Bruce Perry
At least we’re all “okay"
#1 Most Stressful Event

“The number one most stressful event for a child is the death of a parent. Number two is to be separated from a parent.”

-Norma Ginther
Disenfranchised Grief

The grief that is experienced when a loss is incurred that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported.
Disenfranchised Grief

- Relationships are unrecognized
- Loss is unrecognized
- Griever is unrecognized
- Loss is somehow stigmatized
What Would be Your #1 Most Traumatic Event?

- Death of your child?
- Abduction of your child?
- Your partner leaving you?
- Your partner leaving you without explanation?
- Becoming seriously ill or disabled or being in pain?
- Becoming seriously ill or disabled or being in pain and not knowing why, how to treat it, and/or if you would get better?
Ambiguous Loss

- Ambiguous loss differs from ordinary loss in that there is no verification of death or no certainty that the person will come back or return to the way they used to be.

- Ambiguous loss freezes the grief process and prevents closure.

-Pauline Boss
Secondary Loss

- No less intense or difficult than the primary loss.
- Emerge out of, or are the consequence of the primary loss.
- The subsequent dominos that fall as a result of the initial loss.
Children do not “talk” grief, they “do” grief.
Normal Responses to Grief

Many of the behaviors we see in children/youth placed in out-of-home care are NORMAL responses to grief.
Why can’t they learn? Listen? Hold still?
According to Dr. Darla Henry...

We pathologize grief and normal responses to trauma.
A Matter of Framing

They are not “manipulative” or “disrespectful”, “defiant”, etc.

The are surviving.
Grief...it’s Not Just Crying

Sideways grief comes out in unexpected ways and can look like naughty behavior.
Normal healthy brains turn off their ability to connect after multiple, unresolved losses.
Grief work first, then connections

Grief work must be done for healing of connections and the restoration of the ability to connect.
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- **Physiological needs**: breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep
- **Safety and Security**: health, employment, property, family and social stability
- **Love and belonging**: friendship, family, intimacy, sense of connection
- **Self-esteem**: confidence, achievement, respect of others, the need to be a unique individual
- **Self-actualization**: morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, experience purpose, meaning and inner potential
Psychological Safety

- Part of protecting youth is to keep them safe from psychological trauma.

- Psychological safety is achieved by parenting in a trauma-informed way, and not threatening to reenact their trauma by moving them if they don’t “behave”.
What are we weighing against?

Visible

Invisible

Physical Trauma

Relational Trauma

Emotional Trauma
Invisible Trauma

If psychological wounds left external marks the way physical wounds do, our children would look like people with leprosy and we would have an entirely different system of care.
Trauma
A new question:

Moving from:

“What’s wrong with you?”

To:

“What happened to you?”

AND how do I do things DIFFERENTLY because of what’s happened to you?
It’s about the present moment

People repeat their trauma over and over in the present moment.

Treatment is not about the story of the past, it is about how the trauma story is being relived now, in the present moment.

-Dr. Bessel van der Kolk
Responding today with yesterday’s fear

Past trauma

Current trigger

Feels like current threat

Results in Trauma response
Linking the Past to the Present

- Trauma brings past experiences into today’s responses and experiences.

- This pattern of response can be healed and relearned.
Healing Trauma

“In order to move on, you must understand why you felt what you did, and why you no longer need to feel it.”

–Mitch Albom, Five People you Meet in Heaven
The goal of trauma treatment and of working with those who have experienced trauma is to make them feel safe.
You are safe now

Response was functional then

It is no longer needed to keep you safe

Identify triggers in the body

Release trauma stored in the body

Relearn new responses
OLD MODEL VS. NEW MODEL

Traditional Interventions
- Disconnects
- Shaming
- Blaming
- Punishing

ANU MODEL OF WELLBEING
- Protect
- Connect
- Regulate
- Grieve
ANU MODEL OF WELLBEING

- PROTECT: Using Trauma-informed Parenting
- CONNECT: Building Networks of Support & Connection
- REGULATE: Engaging in Integrative Healing Interventions
- GRIEVE: Addressing Grief, Loss & Trauma
Now is our time. This is our issue.

“Our lives begin and end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

-MLK, JR.

It is a Human and Civil Rights Issue.

Youth deserve to be free from:

- Experimentation of psychotropic medication.
- Disconnection from their family and those they love.
- Being blamed for what happened to them and the resulting natural responses.
- The persistent psychological trauma of having no permanent family and the constant threat of disruption of caregivers.
Wrap Up and Questions

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