

The Impact of Trauma on Children

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**Women's Support and
Information Center**

There is a way out of violence!



ENCLAVE

Enhancing the capacity of legal & justice
professionals on forensic interview procedures
for child victims and witnesses of violence



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TRAUMATIC CRISIS

A child's and adolescent's normal reaction to an event, where the child's/adolescent's previous experiences and skills are not sufficient to understand and cope with what has happened.

TYPE I AND TYPE II TRAUMA

Type I trauma: a single traumatic life event.

Type II trauma / complex trauma: repeated traumatic events usually begin in early childhood; physical and/or sexual abuse, emotional abandonment, witnessing violence, long-term war experiences, refugee life, mental pressure and brainwashing of political prisoners, etc.

TRAUMA

Trauma is a tragic trace of the past in the present

An overwhelming traumatic situation or series of repeated experiences affects the individual on many levels

Traumas can temporarily or permanently affect not only the child's/adolescent's ability to cope with the incident, their perception of danger and understanding of themselves and the surroundings, but also their physiology

COMPLEX TRAUMA



Complex trauma is damage to children caused by several traumatic events, which has a wide-ranging and long-term effect on:

- emotions
- behaviour
- social relations
- cognitions
- self image
- coping with stress

COMPLEX TRAUMA II

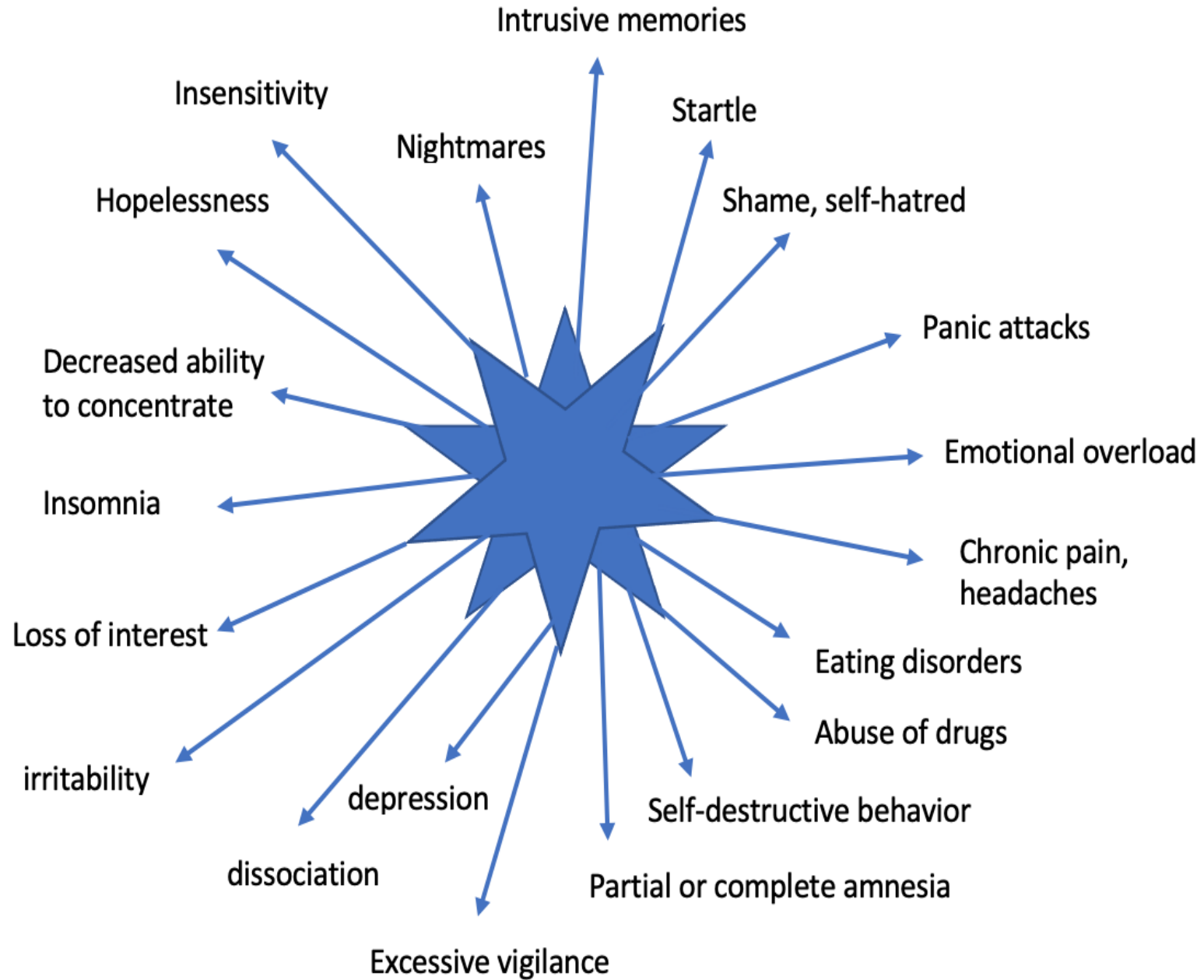
Children and adolescents with **complex trauma** are often characterized by high vigilance, which makes it difficult to:

- concentrate
- maintain attention
- reminiscence
- memorize
- organize and process information
- execute planning and problem-solving skills

COMPLEX TRAUMA III

Experiences of **complex trauma** usually begin in childhood or adolescence; are perpetrated by caregivers or other adults who are expected to provide a safe, predictable, and secure environment; involve repeated incidents of abuse over an extended period of time; and create fragmentation and mistrust in the lives of survivors.

THE IMPACT OF COMPLEX TRAUMA ON MENTAL HEALTH



TRAUMA MEMORY

Traumatic memory is different from a person's autobiographical narrative because it is partially or completely dissociated, i.e., turned off, which makes it difficult to question the child in the process.

The less a child or young person wants to remember events, the more these memories affect children and young people unconsciously.

TRAUMA REACTIONS

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- reliving the event (flashbacks)
- old fears resurface
- many are afraid of being alone
- the excitement threshold is lowered, even the smallest details startle
- difficulty falling asleep
- loss of appetite
- tiredness
- fear and anxiety
- angry outbursts and irritability

TRAUMA REACTIONS II

- constant vigilance
- self-blame
- shame
- feeling defiled
- difficulty concentrating
- sleep disorders
- avoidant behavior
- abuse of drugs
- somatic complaints
- depression
- suicidality

Physical reactions

NAUSEA

VOMITING

CHILLS

UNWANTED
URINATION

SELF-HARMING

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

- PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can develop when a child experiences one or more traumatic life events.
- PTSD occurs as a delayed response to an exceptionally life-threatening or frightening situation.
- Re-experiencing the incident in imagination, dreams, fear of objects and activities reminiscent of the trauma, falling asleep and sleeping disorders, sadness and suicidal thoughts are characteristic to PTSD.
- PTSD symptoms can be a cross between abuse and substance use.

Possible triggers of a traumatic experience I

- Triggers of a traumatic experience are situations and/or sensations that can lead to re-experiencing the trauma
- Traumatic experience triggers rekindle emotions and memories of the trauma and cause intense and disturbing mental and physical reactions

Possible triggers of a traumatic experience II

- seeing the abuser
- hearing the abuser (hearing the words the abuser used)
- taste
- smell
- feelings associated with or reminiscent of the traumatizer
- people, situations with perceived similarity
- physical contact that resembles the abuser (avoidance vs. promiscuity)

Possible triggers of a traumatic experience III

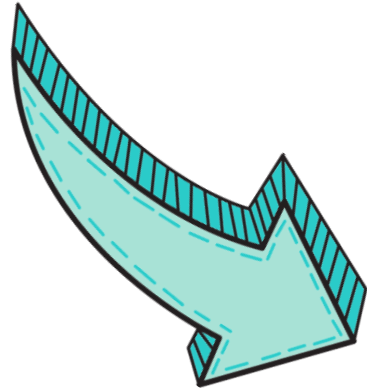
- Triggers can have many individual variations
- A child's/adolescent's behavior that is difficult for a social network to understand may be due to triggering of the trigger (or perceived fear of it) and an inability to cope with controlling the trigger
- Knowing your triggers is a predictor of better coping and an important goal of therapy

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Traumatized children/adolescents need a perceived **sense of control**, which makes them particularly sensitive to stimuli that are not in the visual field

Example: An 18-year-old young man, who has been a victim of sexual abuse since the age of 11, cannot sit in the auditorium with his side or back to the door as a student, because the behavior of the abuser was unexpected and the trigger therefore is the door (generally entrances).

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?



WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

Sexually abused child needs:

SENSE OF CONTROL

SAFE
ENVIRONMENT

DEFINITE
BOUNDARIES

STABLE LIVING
ARRANGEMENT

SAFE ADULT

NON-
JUDGEMENTAL
ATTITUDE



Thank you!