

# Unresolved Trauma and loss and it's impact on Attachment Relationships

**Alice Cook PhD Student**  
**Royal Holloway University**  
**Family Assessment Practitioner**  
**Honorary Lecturer for the University**  
**of Kent's**

***Child Protection Centre***  
**[alice.cook00@googlemail.com](mailto:alice.cook00@googlemail.com)**

*‘The tragedy is not that a man dies the tragedy of life is what dies inside a man while he lives’.*

(Albert Schweitzer)

# What do we mean by trauma and loss?

## Trauma

- Attachment based trauma.
- Childhood incidences of severe abuse and neglect.
- Physical and/or psychological threats or assault to a child's physical integrity, sense of self, safety or survival.
- Fear of disintegration, threat to psychic survival, far beyond the moment of threat.

# Loss

- The loss of someone in an unexplained and/or unexpected way.
- ‘The Trauma of Loss’, (Bowlby 1998).

# Trauma

- 'Big T' trauma, and 'Small T' trauma.
- 'Big T'- sexual abuse, rape, physical abuse.
- 'Small T'- neglect or a depressed or chronically mis-attuned carer.
- 'Small T' trauma can be just as **destructive** as 'Big T' trauma.

# Infancy

- Inaccessible caregiver-rejecting or inappropriate response.
- Minimal/unpredictable arousal regulating behaving.
- Extreme levels of stimulation and arousal.
- No interactive repair-Intense negative emotional states are long lasting.
- Alterations in brains biochemistry.

## Emotional Dysregulation

- Abusive/neglectful caregiver does not offer experience of regulating babies emotions.
- Developmental impact.
- Infancy- self soothing.
- Potential for misdiagnosis-  
ASD/ADD/ADHD/ODD

1. More extreme behaviour during tantrums.
2. Difficulty in understanding and expressing emotional states.
3. Difficulty in awareness of others emotional states.
4. Rigid behaviour patterns.
5. Difficulty with change in routine.
6. Over or under reactivity to touch and sounds.

- Adolescence and adulthood- unable to soothe themselves in ways that are not **destructive**.
- Helplessness can lead to desire to want to control and dominate.
- Violence and aggression- **'Trauma Organised System' (Bentovim 1995)**
- Creating an, **'aura of violence, aggression and threat'**.
- Victimization.
- Hypervigilance.

- IWM-  
‘Unlovable, Deserving of abuse’.
- Development of, ‘False Self’.
- ‘The material for constructing and image of oneself is oneself alone’ (Sleed and Fonagy 2010)
- Most predictable pattern of thought, ‘I’m Unlovable’.

# Unresolved

- Unable to process what has happened.
- Unable to, 'come to terms with it'.
- Unable to make sense of it.
- Experiences remain unresolved.

# Resolution

- Memories are integrated into their original context.
- Brain has filed and processed them correctly.
- When unresolved- intrusive memories flooding the persons conscious thoughts.
- Uncontrollable flashbacks (sights, sounds and smells)

# Impact of Trauma on the individual

- Cognitive, social, emotional, physical, psychological development.
- Behavioural and emotional problems.
- Substance abuse/health problems.
- Mental health disorders-borderline personality disorder/depression.
- Relationships.

‘Traumatized individuals see and feel only their trauma, or they see and feel nothing at all; they are fixated on their traumas or somehow psychically absent’.

(Sykes and Wylie, 2004)

# Dissociation

- 'Psychically absent'
- Shutting down and disconnecting with the world.
- Involuntarily.
- Adaptive.

'Nowhere to run and no one to turn to', (Schoore 2003).

# Impact on Parenting

- Frightened or Frightening (Main and Hesse 1990).

Child attachment system



Parent care giving system

- Vulnerability triggers old unresolved feelings of fear, anger, distress or abandonment.

‘Overwhelmed by his own attachment needs, the parent then fails to provide care and abdicates his position as protector precisely at the moment of the child's greatest need.’

(West and George 2000).

# Angels and Ghosts

- Ghosts in the nursery (Selma Fraiberg 1975)
- Angels in the nursery (Alicia Lieberman 2005)

- Not the existence of past trauma but its resolution- 'safe haven'.
- 'Earned Autonomy'-Prevents the transmission of negative attachment patterns.
- Are those parent's who want to access therapy able to receive this?

# Importance of ULT in social work

1. Importance in assessing risk in child protection.
2. Support and Intervention.

*Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma.*

*Empowerment and re-connection are the core experiences of recovery (Herman 1992).*

# What's needed?

“If we are to truly effect change, we must provide high-risk families with what they need, first to heal and repair and then to grow and flourish”.

Slade et al (2005)

- Intelligent kindness and unsentimental compassion.
- Epistemic Trust....
- Attachment and Trauma lens.

UNDERSTANDING DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

David Shemmings and  
Yvonne Shemmings



Theory and Practice  
of Working with  
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UNDERSTANDING  
**DISORGANIZED  
ATTACHMENT**

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An Evidence-Based Model  
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Edited by  
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# Relational Trauma in Infancy

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Psychoanalytic, Attachment and  
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to Parent-Infant Psychotherapy



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# TELLING STORIES?

Attachment-Based Approaches  
to the Treatment of Psychosis



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why empathy is essential—  
and endangered

**BORN**

**F**  **R**

**LOVE**

Maia Szalavitz

Bruce D. Perry, M.D., PH.D.

*AUTHORS OF *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog**

"Empathy, and the ties that bind people into relationships, are  
key elements of happiness. *Born for Love* is truly fascinating."

—Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*