



Full Text of Presentation by Dr Margot Sunderland

What is Developmental Trauma?

“Trauma comes from the Greek meaning ‘wound’- and earlier derivation meaning to pierce. An external stressor that cannot be prepared for, that breaks through (pierces) the protective shield of the ... mind and cannot be adequately processed.” (Sinason 2020:35)

When the person who is meant to protect you, is actually a source of danger to you/ a source of acute psychological pain.

The emotional pain of being on your own in a world [that feels so unsafe] and without a comforting other

(Baylin and Hughes 2016 : 45)

Developmental Trauma

Multiple exposures to:

Emotional/ physical neglect Abandonment Betrayal

Physical or sexual assaults

Witnessing domestic violence

Daily mode of painful negative and/or shaming interactions between the parent and child

Traumatic neglect

Early life experiences of feeling you are not of importance to or valued by your parent. As one child expressed it, “I was set aside.” (Baylin and Hughes 2016:45)

Traumatic neglect

Your mother has left you alone with your siblings and locked the door. You are starving. Mum smokes crack so there is no money left for food. The neighbours know about your hunger and sometimes throw you cupcakes through the letter box. They are too frightened to tell social services because mother’s boyfriend might attack them. The cupcakes are a good day. On a bad day you draw pictures of food on paper and swallow them instead.(Camilla Batmanghelidjh. Kids Company)

Professor of Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology University College London (UCL)

In his research he has found three brain systems adversely affected by child maltreatment

- Threat processing system
- Reward processing system
- Memory processing system

(McCrory et al 2017)

(see handout pack for details)

Developmental trauma is interpersonal trauma involving major disruption to the attachment relationship.

Sometimes children with developmental trauma need to attach first to animals before humans, in order to move from blocked trust to trust

Research with 7 to 12 –year- old boys (disorganised attached) in a stressful situation.

Stress levels went down in a stressful situation with a dog but not with a toy dog or friendly peson

Beetz et al (2011) The Effect of a Real Dog, Toy Dog and Friendly Person on Insecurely Attached Children During a Stressful Task: An Exploratory Study. Multidisciplinary Journal of The Interactions of People & Animals 24(4):349-368 December 2011.

Due to major disruption to attachment relationship, the child suffers:

- Problems with attention/ concentration
- Poor emotional regulation

Secure attachment: The development of effective stress regulatory systems in the brain

When parents are not emotionally responsive or not emotionally responsive enough of the time (insecure attachment), children don’t develop effective stress regulatory brain systems, and instead learn to suppress their emotions or cope with their emotions in other defensive ways. Without our help, many will then develop anxiety, depression, problems with anger or other long term mental/physical health problems.

Poor emotional regulation means inability to handle stress well

Minor stressors are then experienced as major emergencies

The resulting hyperarousal is awful, so you've got to do something to release the tension /stop the pain

- Hit someone
- Take drugs
- Drink alcohol
- Self-harm
- Starve yourself
- Numb out

MARK JOHNSON:

As a child, his father regularly beat him up laying him out flat and brutally kicking him. Once his father tried to throw Mark on the fire. His mother, a Jehovah's Witness said "I can only love you if you love my God" ...
I couldn't live with Mark Johnson's head without drugs

More ways to recognise **developmental trauma**...

....it has consistent and predictable consequences with symptoms that differ from those described for PTSD

Some of the following:

- Lack of trust
- Cutting off of all vulnerable feelings
- Dissociation as a survival mechanism
- Chronically low, and shame-based self-esteem often covered up with anger and need to be in control
- Behaviour: Trauma re-enactments making others feel as they have felt e.g. frightened, alone, helpless, de-humanised and/or re-enacting self as victim by 'finding oneself' in abusive adult relationships
(Adapted Bessel van der Kolk 2018)

My feelings

- I don't cry any more –it's too painful.
- I don't go for comfort anymore- it's too painful.
- I don't feel sad anymore – it's too painful.
- In fact, I don't feel any vulnerable feelings.

"These children stop being sad. They are not safe enough to be sad." (Dan Hughes 2017)

Cutting off from their own distress... even as babies.

My feelings

- For some children/young people who have experienced developmental trauma, not all:
- I feel safest with just one feeling: anger. it makes me feel powerful and strong. Anger works for me.
- My anger triggers anger and/or fear in other people.

"Anger seemed to be his only way to enter into a relationship " (Dan Hughes 2017)

"They don't need more punishment they need to be helped to feel again." (Camilla Batmanghelidjh Centre for Child Mental Health London 2008)

Developmental trauma

My feelings about other people

I don't trust anyone.

I rely on myself.

I don't want your help.

I don't want your comfort.

I don't care if people like me or not.

I don't look for love or affection or praise.

If you are lovely to me I might have to trash what you do/ say/ give me as it doesn't fit with my view of myself as bad/unworthy.

Too many relationships with key adults in my life have been about power and control so I bring power and control into my relationships now. (I do not know about relationships that bring warmth, compassion, comfort and elevate my dignity because I've not experienced that).

"I don't rate you because you love me.

It must mean there is something wrong with you.

"If you have no imprint in your mind of what the milk of human kindness tastes like, your brain has a hard time responding to the milk of human kindness." (Bessel van der Kolk CCMH 2017)

For some children with developmental trauma: My relationship with foster parents

- *I want to be in control of key adults in my life and of every social situation, so I don't feel that unbearable helplessness ever again.*
- *I am not here to love you (foster parent) but to control and manipulate you.*
- *You are worthless to me if you don't give me what I want and do what I say.*
- *I can get really angry and hate you if you don't give me/ do what I want.*
- *I can be very charming and affectionate when I want something from you.*
- *If I hurt others, it serves them right.*
- *It's other people's fault if I get angry or destroy something.*
- *If you try using power and control in disciplining me, I will get even with you.*

So what can we do to enable these children/young people to move from blocked trust to trust?

- Vital need for daily contact from the same emotionally available adult (not different adults everyday) in order to establish, for the first time, a belief that there is a safe relational world out there.
- Attachment "If you feel attached to someone that IS resilience against trauma" (Bessel Van der Kolk 2020)

First and foremost, we need to make sure they feel very psychologically safe with us.

It's easy to know if a child/young person is feeling psychologically safe or unsafe with you...

Social engagement system:

- Eye contact,
- Smiling
- Can engage in learning

Social defence system:

- No eye contact,
- No smiling
- May turn away or become hostile with challenging behaviour.

Cannot engage with you or with their learning .

Some adults unwittingly trigger a child's social defence system. As a result the child will "Shrink from the world or do battle with it"
(John Bowlby: Founder of Attachment theory)

"We cannot be annoyed with children who will not allow themselves to be vulnerable. Rather, we should find ways to help them to experience greater psychological safety."
(Dan Hughes 2017: 20)

PACE is a way of relating to children/teenagers with developmental trauma, that supports them to feel so safe and socially engaged that they do not want to fight with you and they don't feel anxious.

As part of any developmental trauma, these children/teenagers have known terrible shame, so never shame them, otherwise hope of secure attachment with you is lost. Shame is so lethal for the human psyche that research shows it triggers in the body the same increase in proinflammatory cytokine activity and cortisol, as happens when you have a physical wound. ...
It's because it is experienced as an assault on the self.

The boundaries/correction NOT to use with children with developmental trauma disorder

- **Discipline with anger** – it will just breed hate and contempt in the child. *"Just stop doing that right now"* etc. is far too shaming. They are likely to want to get even. Cut your clothes up!
- **Withdrawal of treats as punishment** - *'Right you are not going swimming.'* Child often experiences this as a betrayal.
- Such comments will break the connection between you. Rather use **"Until"** Delay gratification rather than take things away. So, *"When you have done x or y you can go swimming."*
- So not, "Right no iPad today" – but

- *"I'm afraid no iPad until you have done x /y"*
- *"I'm afraid no x, until you have picked up the spaghetti you threw on the floor."*

Schools need to do the same: shaming or angry discipline will just trigger children/teenagers with developmental trauma into fight/flight/ freeze

Books for connection with correction (see handout)

Foster carers, school staff etc., to learn sentence stems for empathic attunement, as disciplining with anger will simply increase blocked trust and rupture any developing attachments.

So you are seeing me as.....

So you are experiencing me as.....

(Unless you are using power, control and anger to set boundaries, it's unlikely to be personal against you. In so many cases it will be negative transference of feelings towards the birth parents)

Teenager (only child) to her single parent

Mum, you're no good with children. You just don't understand me.

Mum : So you're seeing me as someone who..... is just not on your wavelength and I guess that must make you feel very lonely sometimes, because it's just you and me. ...And maybe you are right. At times I haven't given you what you needed, and if so, I really regret that.

Children and teenagers with developmental trauma and resulting block trust who have only known relationship based on power and control

.....can pull you in one or more of these four directions:

- Make you angry
- Make you give up on them
- Make you feel awful/ashamed
- Make you feel scared of them

(Dan Hughes 2017)

Refuse the power-play and cross the transaction with unexpected playful or curious or reflective connection.

Help them to find the words for their feelings

- We know from the research that *affect labelling* reduces stress dramatically (being able to put words to feelings).
- Children with developmental trauma may not be able to affect label well, as their parent didn't use mental state talk.

"I'm not eating my dinner inside "

(it's bonfire night, a very cold day and its starting to rain)

Speaking for the child to help them to find words for their inner life.

AVOID :

CHILD: I'm not eating my dinner inside.

ADULT :You WILL eat your dinner inside.

INSTEAD:

Mum: Hey Tom can I see if I can understand why you might feel so strongly about this? If I'm right, can you give me a thumbs up and if I am wrong thumbs down.

Speaking for the child:

Mum, I'm so disappointed that I can't eat my dinner outside. Bonfire night comes once a year... I want to see if I can see fireworks in the sky.

Tom puts thumbs up

I am so angry with you Mummy for making me have my dinner inside.

Tom puts thumbs up

Mum: Thanks for letting me know Tom.

My feelings about myself

"I am bad, and if stuff goes wrong it's my fault."

Very rare indeed for emotionally/physically abused children to realise that the issue lies with their parent. It's not their fault.

- Mother's day card

To my one and only Mum who is bad to me.....

"If I am good, how can you be bad to me if you are good? The reason you are bad to me is because I must be bad." (Eleanore Armstrong- Perlman 1995: 94)

You blamed yourself to give yourself a coherent narrative about that awful life event because nothing else made sense (Graham Music 2012)

Negative self- referencing

"He felt he was to blame for all the badness in the world."

Noah (age 11) who burnt his face out of every photograph because he felt he was spoiling the photo and wanted to work down a sewer (for real). His mother had repeatedly called him, "A little shit."

So what can we do to help children who think they are scum ?

If we don't help Noah make sense of his life story and what happened to him, it's tantamount to emotional neglect as we are by-standing the abuse that is continuing in his inner world...If so, we should not be surprised when he moves into suicidal ideation at age 15

So although he had been taken into care at 8, the abuse has continued (in his internal world).

This is because no one had helped him make sense of his life story and find a different meaning to that of

" I'm utterly loathsome"

They need to tell their story to end the negative self-referencing and move from self-loathing to self- compassion

"You had that awful experience, but you couldn't reflect on it, grow from it, because no one helped you to go back over it and make sense of it, reflect on it, make new meaning. If I can help you think about your story you can start to re-edit it, change your story about yourself from negative to positive and find compassion for that hurt kid inside you."

(John Baylin, CCMH 2017)

Tom age 15 who longed for his Mum to smile..... at him. The meaning he had taken from his mother putting him into care when he was 13, was that he was utterly unloveable.

Practitioner (empathy for Tom) To feel so unloved by the person you love so much, want so much, yearn for so much ...Dreadful.

Practitioner (empathy for Tom) You just want your Mum to love you like you love her. Of course you do TomYou just want your Mum to see all the lovely things that *are* Tom... that I see and the other young people and adults see in you, of course you do. ... And I understand it is breaking your heart that she can't do that.

Practitioner (psychoeducation for Tom).

"Because of what happened to some parents in their childhoods not all parents are good at looking after children. You've told me that your Mum's Dad wasn't good at looking after her. You told me he hit her and said he wished she had never been born--- and that's why she didn't learn enough about how to look after you in the way you needed her. Because she never had loving parenting.

Oscar Wilde, a famous writer said, ' We all need love... the problem is... who can do the loving?' Some parents can't ...but other adults in your life now do Tom."

Relate (re-parenting in terms of key relational needs)

Support Tom to grieve and find empowered anger, and to feel he really matters to you and the other emotionally available adults in his life.

We owe to children and young people to enable them to move from negative self-referencing to self- compassion and coherent narrative.

Research shows just one emotionally available adult who believes in the child or young person is everything. Who takes the time to get to know them and to hear their life story when they are ready to tell it.... It might be a teacher, a foster carer, a therapist, anyone trained in this work.

Attachment play: A key intervention to support the development of good self-esteem.

Communicating key psychological messages

You have my full attention

I delight in being with you

You are delightful

BACK TO OUR KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA

- Lack of trust
- Problems with emotional regulation: Explosive outbursts: minor stressors seen as

- major emergencies
- Cutting off of all vulnerable feelings
- Chronically low, and shame-based self-esteem often covered up with anger and need to be in control
- Behaviour: Trauma re-enactments making others feel as they have felt e.g. frightened, alone, helpless, dehumanised.
- (Adapted Bessel Van der Kolk 2018)

Trauma Re-enactments

Trauma re-enactments happen when no one has heard the child's story and helped them make sense of what happened.

Gillian Bradshaw's research found that abused elephants when taken to the animal sanctuary would kick other elephants on their flanks in exactly the place that they had been beaten by the circus master

- How elephants are opening doors: developmental neuroethology, attachment and social context. G.A. Bradshaw. *Ethology*, 2007, 113, 426-436.

Trauma enactments involve re-victimisation where the traumatised person can repeat a version of what happened to them, either as victim or persecutor

Freud's concept of repetition compulsion

- All those years ago, Freud wrote about the compulsion to repeat the traumas we have experienced

So some children who've watched domestic violence will go on to be perpetrators and others to be victims.

The latter will be drawn to relationships where they end up getting abused/ hit/ controlled/ abandoned etc., just like what happened to them as children.

Dissociation

Developmental trauma:

Mad situation – the person you want to go to for comfort is actually terrifying and you suffer repeated near death experiences

Dissociation is a mental state in which people feel disconnected from their sense of self, as a defence against [unbearable overwhelming feelings]. It results in the separation of normally related mental processes. This can last for hours, or due or in severe cases for weeks and months. This can lead to depersonalisation or derealisation (Sinason 2020)

"When a child faces near-death experiences regularly at home, it wears down their defences.....Luckily a small child or vulnerable adult can dissociate." (Sinason 2020)

Dissociation happens when fight/flight or freeze are not possible

- **He or she was too little/weak/ traumatised to:**
- Run away from an abusive adult or adults so flight is impossible
- Attack an abusive adult back so fight is impossible.
- He or she would be in other danger through freezing.

- With no fight, flight or freeze for defence... the creative child can run into another part of their mind. This is dissociation.
- (Valerie Sinason 2020. *The Truth about Trauma and Dissociation*)
- Disconnecting from what is going on – and so disconnecting from their emotions, body sensations, memories, etc. Switching off from reality is a defence mechanism that helps us cope with a trauma. A sense of, *"This is not happening to me."*

Depersonalisation

Detached or disconnected from yourself.

You are observing yourself.

Feeling like a stranger in your own body. Feeling that your body, arms, legs are distorted (Sinason 2020).

-Feeling that your sense of self is not real. Feeling like a stranger to yourself.

Out of body experiences

I felt like my body didn't belong to me, it was like I was an outsider watching my own story unfold. Like watching myself from a third person perspective.

De-realisation

A sense of disconnection your environment. It does not feel real. Ceilings and wall might feel they are moving or blurred or sharper.

(Sinason 2020)

Disconnected from your environment.

In a room but the room doesn't feel real or you are in a different place from where you really are.

"At age three, I remember leaving my own body at nightas my parents would be beating each other to death downstairs. I grew up thinking I really could fly. I only learned [that this was actually] dissociation last year.

I feel far away, muffled, floaty kinda dreamlike. It's a scary uncontrolled feeling." (Cikanvicius 2019)

Fight, Flight, Freeze, Flop

- Carolyn Spring* added flop as a fourth category to the survival mechanisms. *"This is a state of total submission when both body and mind become malleable-someone is reduced to a puppet on a string - no higher functioning of the mind not available in such a state - there is no protest"* (Sinason 2020)
- Children and adults who have been trafficked, raped, modern slavery, tortured in organised ritualistic groups People working around in death camps no response to what is happening around them. *Carolyn Spring.(2019) Unshame: Healing Trauma-based Shame through Psychotherapy*

Primo Levi (1987)

They the drowned form the backbone of the camp, non- men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer.

One hesitates to call them living, one hesitates to call their death, death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand

"We all need to dissociate at times The innocent prisoners on death row, the tortured and

displaced, fear of Covid, the terrible plight of refugees dying in boats, the awful conditions of prisons.....How much can we hold?"
(Valerie Sinason 2020)

Dissociative Amnesia

where someone loses memory or information about themselves

Re-victimisation

can happen even if there is no event memory of the trauma, due to infantile amnesia.

So if a child has been badly physically abused at 2, they may hurt an animal not no why they did so, and/or have no memory of doing so, due to dissociative amnesia.

Ruth Lanius's famous study of complete emotional shut down with unbearable experience in a woman who is insecure attached
Frewen PA, Lanius RA (2006) 'Toward a psychobiology of posttraumatic self-dysregulation: reexperiencing, hyperarousal, dissociation, and emotional numbing', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences Jul;1071:110-24.*

Husband - hyper-arousal-

- Intense anxiety, arousal ,
- Heart rate - 13 bpm over the baseline
- Strong responses in thalamus, anterior cingulate, parietal. Occipital, temporal and frontal lobes, hippocampus, amygdala.

(six months later after exposure based treatment - no ptsd

Wife - reported feeling extremely numb and frozen

Response in the occipital lobe

No heart rate change

Six months later after exposure based treatment - still ptsd (emotional numbness means lack of successful processing of the trauma)

Memory loss (dissociative *amnesia*) **is also possible** for short or long periods of time. Adults with dissociative amnesia can find themselves in a strange place without knowing how they got there.

So what can we do to help these children and young people to dare to feel their feelings and turn towards that little traumatised boy or girl inside them and hear their story? So that dissociation is no longer necessary.

Cognitive Grounding

Using thoughts/reassuring self-talk to tell yourself that you are in a safe place, Speak out loud to yourself . The trauma happened when I was 4 in the bedroom at home. I am now 32 and in a friend's house, so I am safe.

Say what year, day and time it is

Dr Tracy Marks

How to Deal with Dissociation as a Reaction to Trauma

Write a comforting statement on a card and carry it with you...

I am safe now

I can cope with this

Things are so much better now

Dr Tracy Marks

How to Deal with Dissociation as a Reaction to Trauma

Sensory Grounding to bring you back to the present moment.

Use strong smells: favourite ones like tea tree oil or coconut oil.

Carry with you a sensory grounding object

Name :

5 things you can see

4 things you can hear

3 things you can touch

(e.g. cold water over your hands)

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste.

Movement

"We need to **MOVE** to deal with our emotions" (Van der Kolk 2020).

Move together to regain sense of synchrony and a felt-sense that life can be about joy and pleasure.

Through physically based assertiveness training for children/teenagers, feeling of being empowered through embodied "No" and "Stop" games and role plays

Karate to feel their body is strong and determined.

To know that they can change the internal state of their body and mind by doing something physical.

Breathing together

Slow breathing together enhances heart rate variability by synchronising cardiovascular rhythms.

Mindfulness. Being able to maintain awareness of the present moment, body sensations, emotions, surroundings, etc.

Appropriate Touch

When the time is right and with the right person, the trauma needs to be processed.

Dissociation as a defence won't be alleviated until they do.

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