Managing COVID-19 related Trauma

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Dr. George Ake

Dr. Jeffrey Lieberman
Guidelines for today:

• You are all on mute, no video. Go wild!
• Use the question box for questions or comments
• Webinar will be recorded and posted
• You send questions to me, I will pass them on anonymously
• ahalladay@autismsciencefoundation.org
Points for discussion

• How can you describe what is going on?
• Is it PTSD? Does it have the potential to be?
• What can we do to help mitigate trauma?
• What resources exist?
Managing COVID-19
Trauma-Informed Approaches

George “Tripp” Ake, Ph.D.
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Agenda

• Definitions of acute, chronic, complex trauma and comparison to COVID-19 related stress

• How can caregivers make a difference?

• Introduce a trauma-informed approach to help take care of:
  • Children
  • Families

• Provide Resources on COVID-19
Even the Experts are Confused as to Which Term is Best

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?
- Chronic Stress?
- Toxic Stress?
- ACES?
- Child Traumatic Stress?
- Complex PTSD?
- Acute vs. Chronic Trauma?
- Developmental Trauma Disorder?
- Allostatic Load?

(Putnam et al., 2015)
Types of Trauma

Acute trauma:
Types of Trauma

**Chronic trauma:**

The experience of multiple traumatic events, often over a long period of time
Types of Trauma

**Neglect:**
- Failure to provide for a child’s basic needs
- Perceived as trauma by an infant or young child completely dependent on adults for care
- Opens the door to other traumatic events
- May reduce a child’s ability to recover from trauma
When Trauma Is Caused by Loved Ones

complex trauma

- Multiple traumatic events that begin at a very young age
- Caused by adults who should have been caring for and protecting the child

COVID-19: A Different Kind of Crisis

- Infectious disease outbreaks are very unique and may not fully fit into how we view other traumatic or distressing events.
- Chronic crisis with insidious stressors that are chronic, silent, and impactful on multiple levels.
- Some examples of potential stressors:
  - Health of loved ones
  - Health of self
  - Separation from family
  - Food insecurity
  - Job insecurity
  - Moral duress
  - Anticipatory and/or traumatic grief
  - Vicarious trauma through media exposure
  - Others?
Already Seeing Confusion Around How To Talk About Trauma and COVID-19

Collective Trauma
COVID as an ACE
Pre-Trauma
Response to Mass Community Disaster
Stressor

Ake, 2020
Framework For Examining Impact of COVID-Related Stress

- Baseline Stress for all (worry about getting sick, trips to grocery store, loss of routine, loss of connection to family, friends, social connections)
- School/Job Changes or Losses, Family Income Changes
- Difficulty with Food Access and Medical/Mental Health Care Accessibility
- Exposure to COVID-Individually or in Family
- COVID-Death

Adapted from Stoddard and Kaufman, 2020
Key Phrases of Danger and Safety

• Families are enduring times of danger right now
  • We need to approach this with appropriate appreciation for how changes and losses related to COVID impact mental health for so many and how, depending on the circumstances, people may experience a trauma (e.g., traumatic loss of a loved one, maltreatment in a home during lockdown,
  • We need to also be careful to avoid making large generalizations that large groups of people will be diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

• Focus on Safety
  • First thinking about how kids and families might be physically safe (including the invisible risks associated with being in contact with others)
  • Next really need to be thinking about how to maintain psychological safety for all at home
Negotiating Danger and Safety Issues

Pre-Existing Trauma History/Symptoms

Increased Frequency, Intensity, and Duration of COVID stressors

Overall COVID-19 Stressors

Increased Risk for Impairment of Functioning and Need for Mental Health Services
• Many versions of this being circulated
• Generally Good to Promote Perspective Taking
• Careful to Not Communicate Judgement (e.g. choosing fear or learning, or growth vs. no control over these things)
How Can Caregivers Make a Difference?
Taking Care of Children

• Find the most developmentally appropriate way to share about COVID-19

• Important to **convey a sense of calm**
  • Kids will be looking to you to see how to respond
  • Model healthy ways of coping and acknowledge limits
  • Don’t make promises you can’t keep re: COVID

• Ensure your **basic needs are met**
  • Eating nutritious food, staying hydrated, sleeping, social connection – integrate these into your daily routine (no guilt, no apologies)
Taking Care of Children

• While it can really be challenging, try to find ways to restore some routine and structure
  • Maintain meal and bed times
  • Maintain rules and expectations
  • Maintain routines for connecting (maybe virtually) with peers as appropriate
  • Maintain any services that can be delivered virtually

• Stay connected with your supports
  • Find supportive adults to talk with
Helping Caregivers Explain COVID-19 to Children

• One resource provided by the NCTSN on helping caregivers in planning a conversation with their family using developmentally appropriate language.

• Conversation topics can include:
  • What the COVID-19 outbreak is
  • How it is contracted
  • What are the possible dangers
  • Protective steps being taken in the community, nation, global community
  • Protective steps everyone in the family can take

(NCTSN, 2020)
Caring for Each Other

Your friends on Sesame Street are here to support you during the COVID-19 health crisis. We know that these are very stressful times; daily lives have been disrupted, and families everywhere are trying to create a new sense of normalcy. Children thrive with structure in their lives and they learn best through play—even in everyday moments like mealtimes and morning and evening routines. So our site is filled with content you can use all day long to spark playful learning, offer children comfort, and focus a bit on yourself, too. After all, it's important that we take care of ourselves, so that we can best care for our families.

Our resources aren't prescriptions you have to follow—just ideas to help your family find ways to breathe, laugh, and play together. We'll be adding more in days and weeks to come, including new messages featuring your furry friends from Sesame Street—stay tuned and sign up for our newsletter for more! #CaringForEachOther
Resources from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) for Families/Caregivers

- Simple Activities for Children and Adolescents: https://www.nctsn.org/resources/simple-activities-children-and-adolescents
Resources from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS)

- Discussing Coronavirus with Your Children: [https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Discussing_Coronavirus_w_Your_Children.pdf](https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Discussing_Coronavirus_w_Your_Children.pdf)


- Taking Care of Family During Coronavirus: [https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Corona_Taking_Care_of_Your_Family.pdf.pdf](https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Corona_Taking_Care_of_Your_Family.pdf.pdf)
One Framework for Consideration

When people are facing stress and difficult life circumstances, it can particularly affect three areas: a sense of safety, feelings of connectedness, and feelings of hope. In each of these areas, educators and other workers can make an impact.

--From: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus on the Teaching Tolerance website of the Southern Poverty Law Center


Danna, Halladay-Goldman, Maze, Ake, Pickens, 2020
Impact on the Workforce (Could be Applicable to Caregivers)

• **Primary trauma**: direct exposure to events that involve a direct threat to the worker, or witnessing threats to others.

• **Moral distress**: stress that occurs when one believes they know the right thing to do, but institutional or other constraints make it difficult to pursue the desired course of action.

• **Secondary traumatic stress**: emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand traumatic experiences of another.

(NCTSN, 2019)
Note About Grief

• **Acute grief reactions** are likely to be intense and prevalent among those who have suffered the death of a loved one or close friend/colleague.
  - May feel sadness and anger, guilt from not being able to prevent death, regret about not providing comfort, and wishing for reunion.

• **Strategies:**
  - Treat acutely bereaved children and adults with dignity, respect, and compassion.
  - Grief reactions are varied; no single “correct” course of or “normal” period of time for grieving.
  - Reassure that experience is understandable and expected.

(Brymer et al., 2006)
Grief, contd.

• **Traumatic Grief**
  - After traumatic death, some individuals **may stay focused on the circumstances of the death**
    - Examples: preoccupation with how death could have been prevented, what last moments were like, who is at fault
  - Traumatic stress reactions interfere with grieving, making it difficult to adjust to death
    - Examples: intrusive, disturbing images of the death; retreating from close relationships, avoiding reminders of the death

• **Strategies:**
  - Allow for initial strong reactions (i.e., numbness to agitation)
  - Inform individual that if they continue to experience grief or depression that affects daily functioning, may be helpful to talk to a clinician or member of the clergy who specializes in grief.

(Brymer et al., 2006)
Connectedness

• **Goal:** To help establish brief or ongoing contacts with primary support persons and other sources of support, including family members, friends, supervisors, and community helping resources.

• **Strategies:**
  - Social distancing does not mean emotional distancing; given that we are maintaining physical distance, we have to get creative with social connection.
  - Help individuals think about type of support that would be most helpful, whom they can approach for that support

(Brymer et al., 2006)
Enhancing Feelings of Hope

• **Goal:** To support individuals moving through this difficult time.
  • How to determine what can and cannot be controlled.

• How can you foster hope in yourself and others?
  • Ask a good friend or family member how he/she/they has maintained hope during the pandemic or how you can look at things from a different perspective.
  • If watching news reports makes you feel hopeless, limit your intake of media and/or social media.
  • Practice gratitude individually or with family members.

(NCTSN, 2018)
Caring for Yourself

Awareness
- Slow down and focus inward for a few moments
- How are you feeling? What is your stress level? What thoughts are you noticing?

Balance
- Give yourself and your colleagues flexibility in managing multiple roles
- Find balance of work, leisure, and rest

Self-Care
- Address basic needs: eat nutritious foods, stay hydrated, practice healthy sleep routines, stay active
- Self-care should not be an independent task; lean in to your teams and find a “work buddy”
“True self-care is not about salt baths and chocolate cake, it is making the choice to build a life you don’t regularly need to escape from, and that often takes doing the things you least want to do. It often means looking your failures and disappointments square in the eye and re-strategizing. It is not satiating your immediate desires. It is letting go. It is choosing new. It is disappointing some people. It is making sacrifices for others. It is living in a way that other people won’t. So maybe you can live in a way that other people can’t.”

-Brianna Wiest
Examples of Self-Care Strategies

• Address basic needs: eat nutritious foods, stay hydrated, practice healthy sleep routines, stay active
• Practice mindfulness or brief relaxation exercises while also allowing yourself to have your own emotional responses
• Lean in to your teams and find a “work buddy” (i.e., self-care should not be a solely independent task)
• Increase frequency of leisure activities: hobbies, journal, draw, paint
• Find meaning: practice religious faith, philosophy, and spirituality; journal, draw, paint
• Maintain social connections in creative ways, while also addressing your boundaries
• Find time to laugh: watch funny videos, play a game
• Participate in formal help if extreme stress persists for greater than two to three weeks

(NCTSN, 2018)
References


Framing the situation (Lieberman)

What is happening to us?
- This is unprecedented in our generation
- Maybe most like the great depression
- Differs depending on where you are, like climate change
  - Broad, pervasive, enduring effect
  - Don’t know how long it is going to last or when it will end
  - Will have substantial disruptive effects

- “To name it is to tame it”
- “The only thing to fear is fear itself”
- Cognitive stance needs to be reframed to understand there are going to be wide ranging and long lasting effects.
Impacts

- Getting through this is not a passive endeavor. It is an active process that requires a lot of work.
- Besides getting sick, the panic and emotion has bigger impacts other than developing COVID-19.
- The disruptive effects on the health system and social functioning are enormous.
- Surge is overwhelming for doctors and health care systems
- Significant economic impacts that will be long lasting.
Implications for individuals

- Everyone is going to be affected
- Those who pass, their loved ones, then out to the population as a whole. Not just by the memory of the pandemic but jobs, economics, employment, and what the world is going to be like in the aftermath.
- Most people will get through it
- Others are more vulnerable to mental health challenges and will need further treatment

- **Types of responses**
  - Residual depression, mood and anxiety issues
  - Response like trauma or PTSD
  - Feelings of loss and grief. These you cannot medicate. You have to manage the process and let it be completed
  - Those who are angry
What should we do?

- Need a public mental health initiative to prepare for these responses
- Society should be preparing for new mental health issues
- Cognitive control over what we are experiencing may help process events, even if it is still hard to deal with it.
Implications for individuals

- Children are affected by this, but adults are more so.
- Parents are the vector by which they will experience stress to some extent.
- Don’t catastrophize. Don’t watch the news 24/7. Don’t spend all day on the internet.
- Put the oxygen mask on you first, then on others around you. Get control of your own mental health.
- Plan how to deal with this. Proactively putting together a structure.
- Reach out and get mental health assistance
Tips for high school and college students

- Just remember, we WILL get through this
- Might need to be flexible in plans.
- Consider gap year or deferral, if that helps you feel more safe
- Could be more virtual options available
- Being creative in how families continue to celebrate milestones like graduation
- We will have to adjust our expectations and realize that we are not alone
- This isn’t fair or lucky.