



Introducing Childhood Trauma

Lynn Miles

Lecturer in Education

l.miles@tees.ac.uk

School of **Social Sciences, Humanities & Law**

tees.ac.uk/socialsciences&law

- **Lynn Miles**
- **Lecturer in Education**
- **Teacher – 20 years**
- **Disadvantaged /
'challenging' children**
- **Survivor of childhood
trauma**

- **What is trauma?**
- **Some types of trauma**
- **The impact of trauma**
- **How we can help?**

What is Trauma?

‘Trauma is an event or series of events such as abuse, maltreatment, neglect or tragedy that causes a profound experience of helplessness leading to terror.’

(IRCT, 2015)

Types of Trauma

Simple Trauma – involves a time-limited, but awful event that usually involves intense emotions and a period of suffering:

- The death of a loved one
- Being in a car accident
- Parents separating or divorcing

Types of Trauma

Complex Trauma – involves early exposure to **ongoing and repeated** traumatic experience that includes factors such as physical, sexual, and / or violence

Interpersonal – the source of the child's trauma is the person or persons who should be there to care for, nurture and protect them, but who instead are the source of their terror and harm

It has **wide-ranging and long-term** impact – can make working with these children and adolescents complex and challenging

Types of Trauma – Relational Trauma

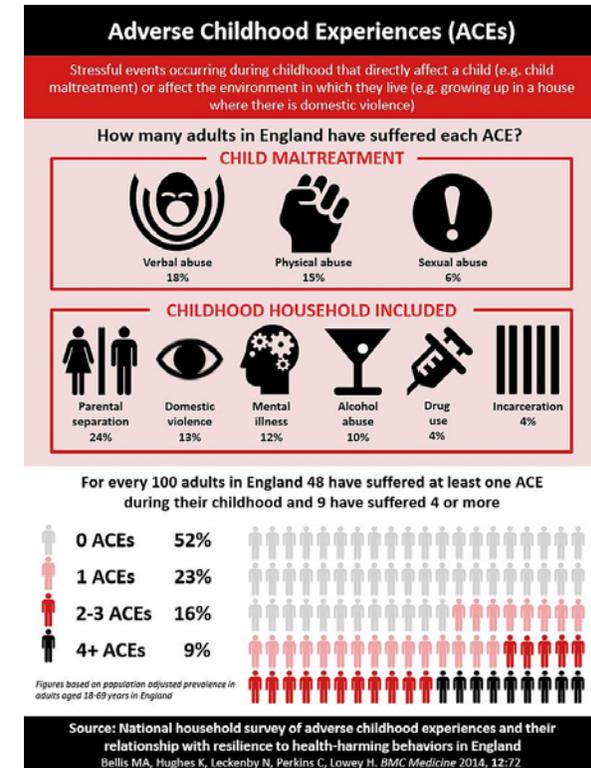
- Also referred to as **attachment-related** trauma
- Refers to children who have experienced trauma within the context of their relationships – often interfamilial, or within their caregiver relationship
- These early relationships and interactions are paramount in providing the organising framework and representational models for a child's future relationships from 'cradle to grave' (Bowlby, 1969)
- A child's developing worldview, sense of self, personality and understanding of others is grounded and moulded through these foundational relationships
- Children develop their internal working models, core beliefs and life scripts from these relationships

Types of Trauma – Developmental Trauma

- During childhood, the brain develops, grows and organises at an incredible rate
- A baby's soft-wired brain is like a sponge, constantly absorbing new experiences and being shaped by its environment
- When trauma and shock occur during this critical sensitive window it impacts the child's neurological, social, emotional, sensorial, physiological, moral and cognitive development
- These children will struggle with sensory-integration, cognitive, executive function and self-regulation difficulties

How Prevalent is Childhood Trauma?

- 50% of children have experienced at least 1 adverse childhood experience (ACE)
- 10% have experienced 4 or more
- Many of those children will have been traumatised by these experiences
- Do not include – poverty, bullying, CSE, care experienced, homeless, war (zero tolerance behavior policies / isolation)



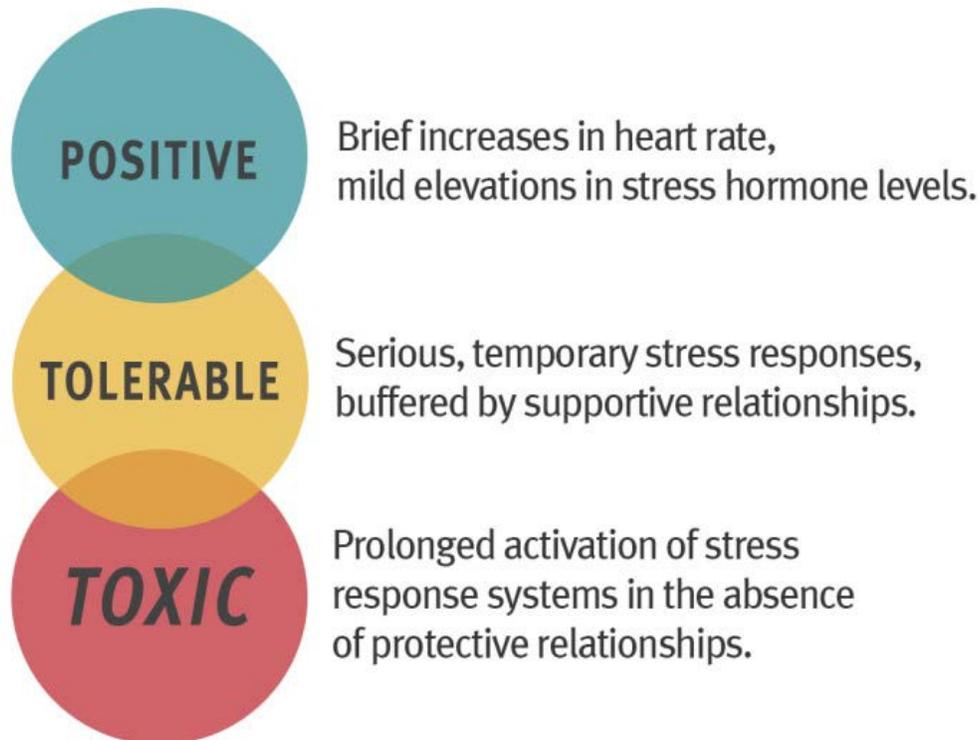
The Impact of Trauma

- Changes the way children interact with others
- Impact relationships with peers and teachers in classroom
- Distrustful or suspicious of others (particularly teachers)
- Difficulty responding to social cues
- May withdraw from social situations
- May bully others
- More aggressive and negative
- *Maladaptive behaviours to help them survive*

***Rules and consequences
- punishments for
behaviours they cannot
control – can lead to re-
traumatisation***

The Impact of Trauma

Toxic Stress



When toxic stress response occurs continually, or is triggered by multiple sources, it can have a cumulative toll on an individual's physical and mental health—for a lifetime. The more adverse experiences in childhood, the greater the likelihood of developmental delays and later health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse, and depression.

The Impact of Trauma



Survival Brain
- Reptilian
Emotional Brain
- Limbic
Thinking Brain
- Neo-cortex

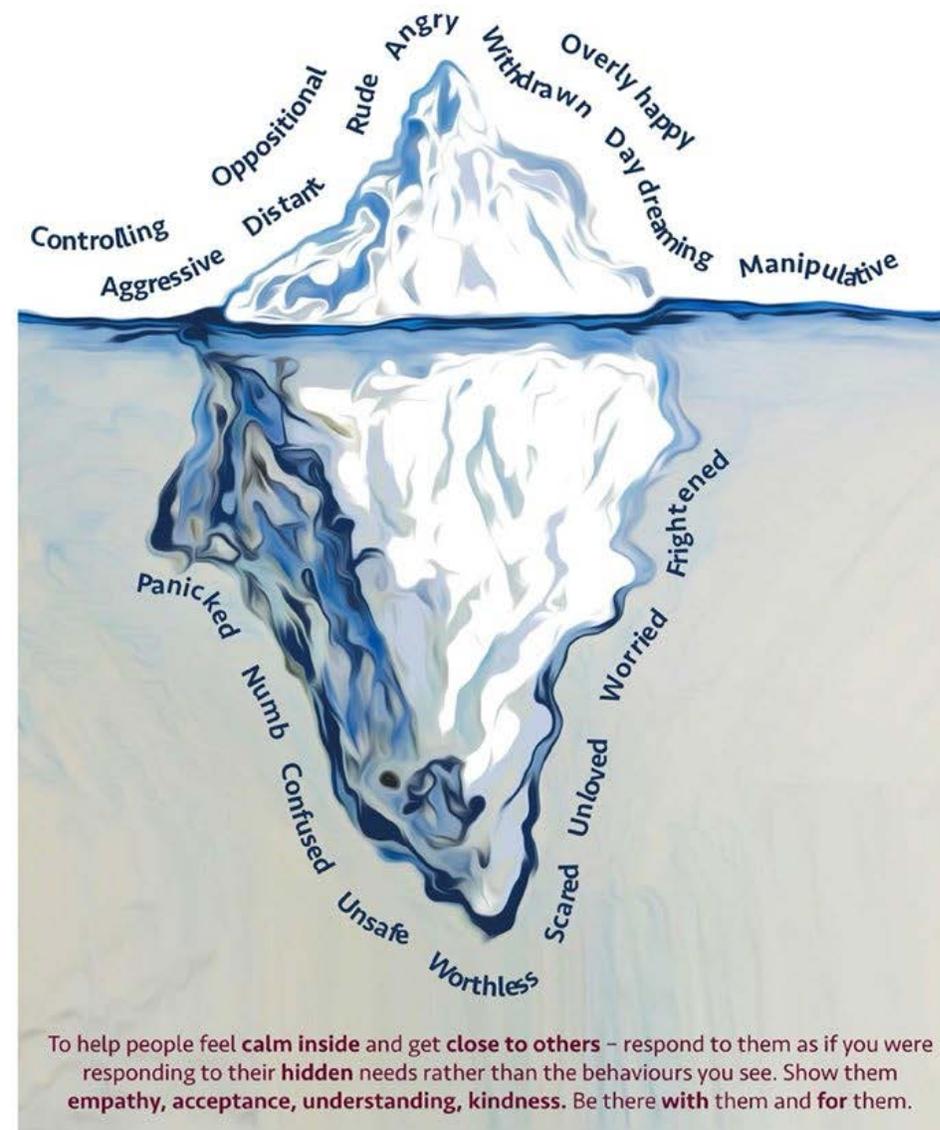
Traumatised children invest more energy in their Reptilian Brain, so they cannot control their Emotional Brain or use their Neo-Cortex for learning.

The Impact of Trauma

People of all ages, from babies to old age, find ways to **manage their emotions** so that they feel as **protected and safe** as possible. It is human instinct to do this. We guard ourselves against feeling **too vulnerable** by showing the world behaviours which keep others at a **safe distance**. Our 'real' needs are **buried deep below** the surface where they are hard to see.

Bringing Hidden Needs To The Surface

People of all ages, from babies to old age, find ways to **manage their emotions** so that they feel as **protected** and as **safe** as possible. It is human instinct to do this. We guard ourselves against feeling **too vulnerable** by showing the world behaviours which keeps others at a **safe distance**. Our 'real' needs are **buried deep below** the surface where they are hard to see.



The Impact of Trauma

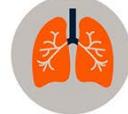
'It takes tremendous energy to keep functioning while carrying the memory of terror, and the shame of utter weakness and vulnerability.'

'Long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger and mobilize disturbed brain circuits and secrete massive amounts of stress hormones.'

The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma
Bessel van der Kolk

The Long-Term Impact of Trauma



BEHAVIOR				
				
Lack of physical activity	Smoking	Alcoholism	Drug use	Missed work
PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH				
				
Severe obesity	Diabetes	Depression	Suicide attempts	STDs
				
Heart disease	Cancer	Stroke	COPD	Broken bones

How Can We Help?

- Become trauma informed (ACE Aware)
- Provide stability and a safe place for children
- Connect them to caring adults (buffer)
- Adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the children
- Adapt behaviour interventions (www.tipbs.com)
- Help to improve children's resilience (bounce)
- Use evidence-based trauma-informed approaches

You may not know who these children are...

One more thing.....

Mindfulness

- Introduced into some schools / large-scale trial across the country
- ‘Being present with whatever is.....’
- Can be harmful to children who have experienced trauma
- Can ‘trigger’ traumatised children
- Might not want to close their eyes
- Will struggle to sit still

If you want to know more...

- Winter University – Understanding Children with SEMH Difficulties
- Summer University – A Difficult Start
- MA Education (Trauma-Informed Practice)
- [Resilience](#) documentary



Thank you

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