The Effects of Trauma on Victims: Physical, Psychological & Behavioral

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Training Objectives

- Identify physical symptoms of trauma
- Identify psychological symptoms of trauma
- Identify behavioral symptoms of trauma
- Discuss the link between these symptoms
- Discuss ways to effectively communicate with victims of trauma
What is trauma?

According to The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition:

- A serious injury or shock to the body, as from violence or an accident.
- An emotional wound or shock that creates substantial, lasting damage to the psychological development of a person, often leading to neurosis.
- An event or situation that causes great distress and disruption.
What are traumatic events?

Individual
- Auto accident
- Sexual abuse/assault
- Life threatening experience
- Robbery
- Physical injury/abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Injury/death to one’s child
- Homicide

Community
- Natural Disaster
- Multiple injury/fatality accident
- Child related traumatic event
- Homicides in community
- High publicity of violence/sex crimes
- Terrorism
- War
Manifestations of Trauma

- Trauma affects all parts of a person
  - Physical symptoms
  - Psychological symptoms
  - Behavioral symptoms
  - MIND-BODY CONNECTION!
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: After trauma, victims are often concerned most about their basic needs and the needs of close family and friends.
What does trauma look/sound like?
Physical Impact of Trauma

- Stress in the Brain
  - Amygdala, Hippocampus
    - Trauma memories
  - Deficits in verbal memory
  - Changes in neural circuitry
Physical Impact of Trauma

- Stress in the Brain
  - Stress hormones
    - Cortisol, norepinephrine
    - Have effects after trauma is over
  - Continued exposure at a young age may cause permanent brain changes
    - Aggression
    - Inattention
Psychological Impact of Trauma

- Short-term trauma
  - 0-3 months after the crime
  - Unexpected emotional upheaval
    - Mood swings
    - Most reactions normal
  - Stages of grief
  - Blaming self or others
Psychological Impact of Trauma

- Long-term trauma: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - No specific timeframe
    - Clinical diagnosis
  - Symptoms
    - Persistent re-experiencing of the event
    - Persistent avoidance of triggers
    - Hypervigilance
  - May reflect physical changes in the brain
Behavioral Impact of Trauma

- Inappropriate Decision-making
- Behavioral expressions of PTSD
- Aggression
- Fight or Flight
  - Incomplete... must include FREEZE
Tips for Helping

- Remain calm
- Speak slowly, be prepared to repeat info
  - Ask how the victim would like it presented
- Mirror the victim’s language use
- Reality test blaming statements (Gently!)
- Have resources ready to distribute
Tips for Helping

- Don’t use euphemisms
- Don’t ask “Why”
- Don’t say things like
  - I understand
  - Don’t worry
  - Calm down or Get control of yourself
  - Closure or Move on
Takeaways

- Mind-body connection
- Look beneath the surface
  - Trauma does not always look/sound the same
  - Trauma does not always look/sound like trauma
- Know your resources
  - Crime Victim Advocacy Center
    - 314-652-3623
    - Supportvictims.org
Questions?
Comments?
Concerns?

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