

Trauma and the Brain

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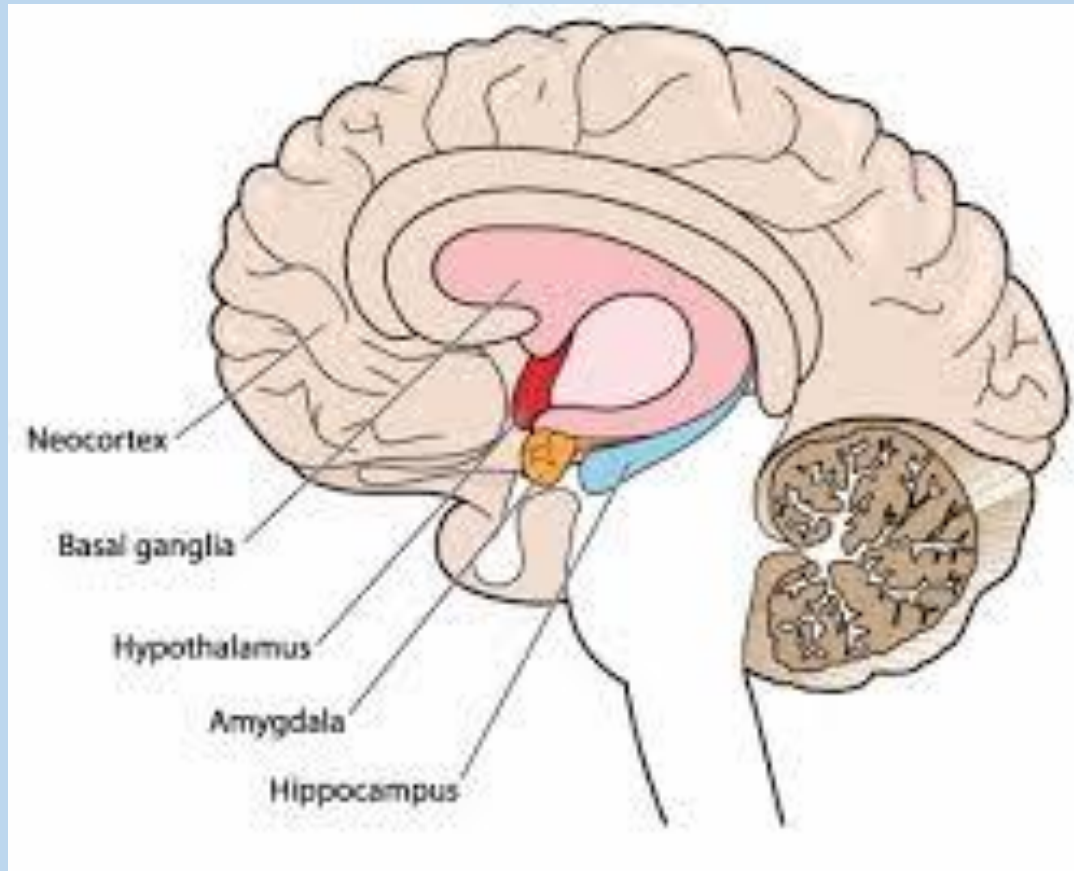
Chesapeake Counseling

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Trauma

- Any **perceived** threat of death or serious injury to self or others
- **Simple Trauma**- single incident i.e. natural disaster, sexual assault, car accident, isolated incident of violence.
- **Complex (repeated) Trauma**- multiple incidents i.e. combat with multiple deployments, multiple simple traumas, can include chronic trauma
- **Chronic (sustained) Trauma**-ongoing physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse (or a child witnessing a parents/caregiver's abuse), bullying

The Brain



Amygdala: fight, flight, or freeze

Hippocampus: long-term memory storage

Prefrontal Cortex: decision making, personality, moderating social behavior, focus, learning, impulse control

Acute Reactions to Trauma

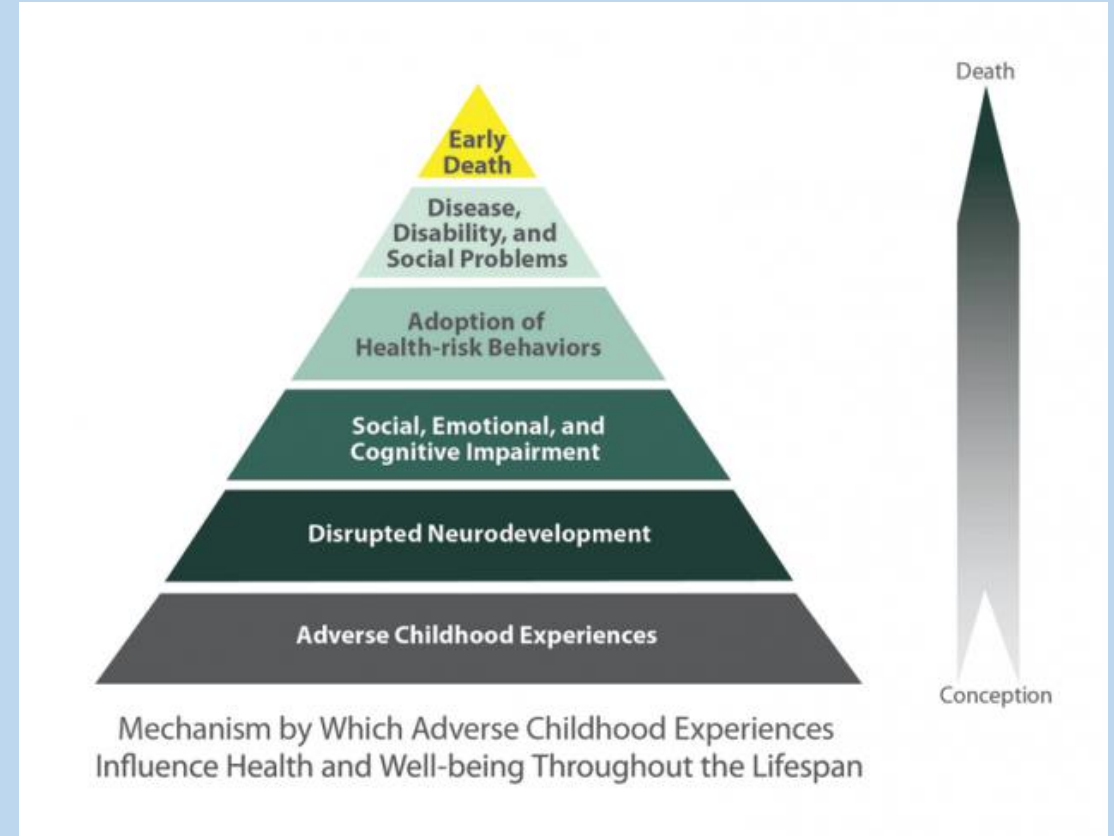
- Nightmares/trouble sleeping
- Decrease or increase in appetite
- Feeling detached from surroundings
- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Feeling jumpy or startling easily
- Feeling constantly alert/hyperaware
- Being very irritable/angry outbursts
- Withdrawing from supports
- Stopping regular routine i.e. exercise, working/school, socializing, hygiene
- Loss of intimacy (physical and emotional)
- Avoiding triggers of the event (people, places, things etc.)
- Feeling numb or sad
- Feeling helpless or scared
- Increase in somatic issues i.e. headaches, backaches, illnesses etc.
- Reliving the event in some way
- Irrational cognitions/change in world view

Long Term Impacts of Trauma

- Continued acute reactions
- Physical health issues
- Depression
- PTSD
- Suicidal ideation/thoughts
- Blaming self/guilt/shame
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Changes brain structure
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (score between 0 and 10)
- Approximately 2/3 of adults had at least 1 yes 12-15 % had 4 or more
- 28.% - 27% Physical Abuse
- 26%- 27% Substance Use
- 23%- 27% Separation/Divorce
- 10%-34% Emotional Abuse

ACE Continued

- Link between ACE score and increase risk of physical and mental health issues including: diabetes, obesity, heart issues, depression, substance abuse/addiction, risky sexual behaviors ect
- 6 or more ACEs died about 20 years earlier than those without any ACE



How to help

- Be mindful of how the brain may be reacting in a situation
- Allow a client space to ground themselves before and during discussions of serious topics
- Allow people time to think about a major decision if possible
- Refer client to therapy if they are not engaged already
- Relaxation techniques that override fight, flight or freeze
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
 - 3 Elements

References

- <http://www.katemcmaughpsychology.com.au/treating-anxiety-whole-brain-approach/> (Brain picture)
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