

HOW ADOPTION IS IMPACTED BY TRAUMA

LONG TERM IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

MARY LOU EDGAR, MSS, LCSW
JESSICA SINARSKI, LPCMH

ADOPTION AND TRAUMA

ADOPTION:
A child finds a home.
Parents find a child.

TRAUMA:
An emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical.

SO, HOW ARE THESE TWO CONNECTED?

STATISTICS

- In fiscal year 2014, the average foster care population of DFS was 602.
- That year, 379 children exited placement.
- 92 children (24.3%) were adopted.
- 71 children (18.7%) were placed with permanent guardians.
- 959 children in the state of Delaware are presently receiving an adoption subsidy – meaning they had significant special needs when adopted and the state continues to provide financial support to the family.

'Multiple Transitions'



ADOPTION, LOSS, BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

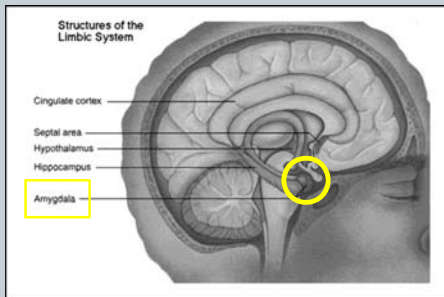
Adoption is about loss.....

Loss is traumatic.....

All trauma impacts brain development.....

In addition to having been impacted emotionally by their life experiences, the brains of our kids have been physically changed.

THE BRAIN

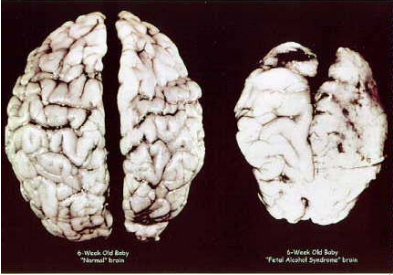


TRAUMA

- **ABUSE AND NEGLECT**
 - IN-UTERO STRESS – caused by maternal stress and/or substance use during pregnancy
 - NEGLECT – absent caregivers, multiple moves/couch-surfing
 - PHYSICAL, SEXUAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE
 - POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)
- **IN-UTERO EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL & DRUGS.**

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Life long implications for behavior & decision making.
85% of people with FASD have no distinguishing facial features




6-Week Old Baby "Normal" brain 6-Week Old Baby "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome" brain

CHILD'S RESPONSE TO TRAUMA


Underdevelopment of the Social Engagement, Trust System

Nurtured child



Social approach (left) Harm avoidance (right)

Neglected child



Social approach (left) Harm avoidance (right)

HARM AVOIDANCE/ approach

Window of Tolerance For Social Engagement

Window of Tolerance for Social Engagement

Kids get stuck in "fight, flight or freeze."

Copyright ©2006 American Academy of Pediatrics PEDIATRICS

CHILD'S RESPONSE TO TRAUMA

- Aggression – toward self and others
- Lying, stealing
- Hoarding
- Destruction of Property
- Self-Harm
- Tantruming, Rage
- Learning difficulties
- Running away

AFTER ADOPTION

WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN AFTER ADOPTION?

After Adoption

- **Legal Family**
 - Change name
- **Issues Remain the Same**
 - Honeymoon Period
 - Trust becomes a major issue – larger than before adoption finalization.
 - Children need to redo developmental stages.
 - ✦ Development stops when children experience trauma
 - ✦ Hungry angry cry is not as cute in a 7- or 17-year-old as it is in a newborn.
 - Triggers become more intense



KEEP IN MIND

THREE YEARS TO HEAL FOR EVERY YEAR LIVED IN A TRAUMATIC PLACE!!

2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009

How Best to Respond to Children?

PARENT BRAIN, CHILD BRAIN:
HOW GOOD CARE PROMOTES THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

PARENT LID
WILL CONNECTED PARENTS' BRAINS

OPENNESS

PARENTAL OPENNESS:
PLAYFULNESS
ACCEPTANCE
CURIOSITY
EMPATHY

PROMOTES GOOD CONNECTIONS IN CHILD'S BRAIN

INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY:
WHY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS TO "KEEP THEIR LIDS ON" AND AVOID "BLOCKED CARE"

Brain Based Parenting
Norton Press, 2012
Daniel Hughes
Jonathan Baylin

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

- JUDGMENTAL, BLAMING.
- PUNITIVE.
- CHILD CONSIDERED TO BE THE VICTIM.
- FAMILIES OFTEN FIND THEY ARE UNABLE TO CONTINUE PARENTING A CHILD.

HOW TO HELP?

UNDERSTAND THAT CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM FOSTER CARE ARE THE SAME CHILDREN WHO WERE PREVIOUSLY IN FOSTER CARE!

THE EMOTIONAL ISSUES THAT IMPACT THEIR BEHAVIOR WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO!

HOW TO HELP?

REALIZE THAT THESE CHILDREN ARE DEALING WITH POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER!

THEY ARE AS DAMAGED – IF NOT MORE SO – AS ANY VETERAN!


THEY ARE DESPARATE AND FEEL AS THOUGH THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES!

HOW TO HELP?

THE HURT OCCURS IN THE CONTEXT OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SO MUST THE HEALING!

THE BEST WAY TO HELP A CHILD HEAL IS TO PROVIDE PERMANENCY!

WHEN YOU ARE CONTACTED, PLEASE REMEMBER THAT CHILDREN GROW BETTER IN FAMILIES!



The End

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

THE MORE WE LEARN, THE MORE LIKELY IT
WILL BE THAT WE CONTINUE TO

CHANGE THE WORLD,
ONE CHILD AT A TIME!!!
