What Makes a Traumatic Event, Traumatic?

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The Cognitive Model of PTSD
(Meiser-Stedman, 2002)

- Reactions (e.g. PTSD)
- Risk factors
- Assessment
- Helpful support
- Effective interventions

Memories of normal events
Contextualised representations (C-reps)

- Memory store
- Unconscious
- Conscious
- Event

Ehlers & Clark, 2000
Brewin et al., 2010

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Different Types of Memories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal event memories</th>
<th>Traumatic event memories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextualised</td>
<td>Sensory-bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>representations (C-reps)</td>
<td>representations (S-reps)</td>
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</tbody>
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- Conceptual Framework contains the perceptual information
- Little conceptual Framework to contain the perceptual information
- Words and stories
- Vivid sensory information
- Fluid, updateable, forgettable
- Static and frozen
- Linked to other memories
- Isolated from other memories
- Historical context – there and then
- No historical context – here and now
- Organised into a coherent narrative
- Disorganised, incoherent, fragmented
- Largely under conscious control
- Uncontrollable, easily triggered
- Contextualised
- Standalone

Memories of traumatic events
Sensory-bound representations (S-Reps)

- "Fixed ideas" of traumatic events, rather than usual memories
- Sufferers are "unable to make the recital which we call narrative memory and yet they remain confronted by the difficult situation"
- Continue to make efforts at adaptation

Pierre Janet’s Description of Traumatic Memories (1889, 1906)
Trauma Memory Quality Questionnaire (TMQQ; Meiser-Stedman et al., 2007)

- Assesses the number of aspects of a memory that are characteristic of traumatic memories
- Related to PTSD diagnosis
- Related to severity of PTSD symptoms

Maintenance cycle of internal avoidance

- Memory unprocessed
- Memories and thoughts suppressed and avoided
- Memory and thoughts intrude (e.g. flashbacks, dreams)
- Bringing original fear, horror, helplessness

Maintenance cycle of external avoidance

- Memory unprocessed
- Triggers and potential triggers avoided
- Memory easily triggered
- Bringing original fear, horror, helplessness
Memories and Brain Activity
(PET Scans; Rauch et al., 1996)

- Areas activated during trauma memories, but not neutral memories.
- Areas activated during neutral memories, but not trauma memories.

Evidence for Dual Memory Systems
(Holmes & Bourne, 2008)

- Tap out a pattern during the film: Decrease in visuo-spatial processing, Fewer intrusions.
- Count backwards in 3s during the film: Decrease in verbal processing, More intrusions.
- Answer questions afterwards: Increase in verbal processing, Fewer intrusions.
- Play Tetris within 30 minutes: Decrease in visuo-spatial processing, Fewer intrusions.

Meaning: Core Beliefs

- Domains:
  - Self (worthy, loveable)
  - World (benevolent, makes sense, safe enough)
  - Others (trustworthy, worth relating to)
- Usually unconscious, unarticulated, taken for granted
- People act as if their assumptions were truths rather than constantly re-examine them
- Often initially evident from people's actions
CBT Fundamentals

Systems (e.g. family, school, peers, community, agencies)

- Thoughts
- Physiological reactions
- Feelings
- Behaviour
- Beliefs

Impact of Traumatic Events

"The trouble is, the rules have been broken" Joe, aged 8

- Trauma-based thoughts
- Traumatised feelings
- Traumatised physiological reactions
- Traumatised behaviour
- Avoidance of activities, places
- Avoidance of people
- Avoidance of thoughts
- Beliefs confirmed not challenged
- Memory not processed

Impact of Multiple Events
Common Traumatic Misappraisals

- World
  - Everywhere is dangerous
- Self
  - I caused it
  - I asked for it
  - I'm only good for one thing
  - I should have stopped it
  - I'm damaged
- Others
  - Nobody cares about me
  - Adults are dangerous, especially those that are supposed to care for me

Child Post-traumatic Cognitions Inventory (CPTCI; Meiser-Stedman et al., 2009, McKinnon et al., 2016)

- 25 statements (e.g., ‘Anyone could hurt me), CYP indicates the extent to which they agree or disagree
- 10 item short form has good psychometric properties
- Two subscales:
  - Fragile person in a scary world
  - Permanent and disturbing change
- Related to PTSD diagnosis
- Related to severity of PTSD symptoms
- Scores on both subscales higher if the trauma was interpersonal

Formulation: Adam (16) - Assault

“The only reason I’ve not been beaten up again, is that I’ve not left the house”
Formulation: Sue (8) - abuse, then amazing foster care

"They don't love me, she's just doing it for the money, he's gonna hurt me some time."

Beliefs:
World is unsafe
Others are dangerous (especially those that are supposed to look after you)
I'm un-loveable
Traumatised

Reactions:
Hyper-vigilance
Hyped-up
Trauma-based thoughts: They're going to hurt me

Feelings:
Fear & suspicion
Abused by parents

Traumatised

Behaviour:
Kicks and bites

S - Rep Memory

Formulation: Ana (9) - Father killed mother

"People tell me I'm stupid, and that I should stop thinking like that, so I've stopped telling people what I think."

Beliefs:
I'm not a good parent, My child is vulnerable

Reactions:
Lethargy, butterflies
Trauma-based thoughts: It's my fault

Feelings:
Guilt, sadness
Father killed mother

Traumatised

Behaviour:
Don't mention it
Don't ask about the impact

S - Rep Memory

Vicarious avoidance

Opportunities to discuss events or reactions

Trauma-based thoughts: Don't mention it. Don't ask about the impact

Traumatised behaviour: Don't mention it. Don't talk about the impact
Risks of not telling children and young people enough information

- They may fill in the gaps
- They may over-generalise
- They may hear it from a source that seeks to sensationalise rather than re-assure (e.g. media)
- They may wonder whom they can trust
- They may assume that it’s not ok to talk about it, and so are left with whatever account they stumble across
- They won’t know how to counter inaccurate accounts
Safety and Stability

- Ensure basic needs are met (including food, shelter, sleep)
- Safe environment (safe enough)
- Families and schools can play a crucial role in making the child feel safe

Psycho-Education

- Education about traumatic reactions, and normalisation
- Education about model (memory, meaning, maintenance) and rationale for treatment
- Sharing the formulation
- Consider using handouts (e.g. Smith et al., 2010), and ask child to read, mark and discuss between sessions and bring them back to next session

Youtube Psycho-education Videos
### Developing individual resources

- Enhancing social support
- Emotion regulation
  - Breathing retraining
  - Relaxation
  - Imagery
  - Grounding
  - Problem solving
  - Use of therapeutic relationship to scaffold affect regulation

### What's so good about social support?

- Lack of social support and social withdrawal are risk factors for PTSD in CYP (Trickey et al., 2012)
- Most people do not develop PTSD, possibly because they find a way to process the event by talking about it within their social support
- Some limited evidence that just Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) reduces PTSD (Markowitz et al., 2015)

### Supportive Others Literally Change How You See the World

- Hills are rated as less steep if you are accompanied by a friend
- The longer you've known them, the less steep the hill seems
- Hills seem less steep if you just think of a friend rather than a neutral person or someone that has betrayed you
Support From Someone you Know, Love and Trust Changes Brain Activity (Coan et al., 2006)

**Social Circles**

Think about the relationships that have an impact on you at the moment (positive, negative or mixed). Put their name, initial or a picture on the diagram below to indicate how involved with them you are or how close they are to you.

- Are you surprised by anything that you notice about your circles?
- Is there any person, or group of people missing?
- Which relationships help and support you through difficult times?
- Which relationships cause some difficulties or distress?
- Which relationships rely on you to make contact?
- Which ones offer you practical support?
- Which ones offer emotional support?
- Which ones are two-way, and which ones are one-sided?
- Which ones would you like to see more of?
- Which ones would you like to see less of?
- How else would you like things to be different?
- How could you begin to make those changes?

Social Circles questions to aid discussion if necessary
Relaxation

- Structured focused guided relaxation may be more useful than lots of silences and just noticing what comes up.
- "Traumatized individuals tend to have difficulty tolerating unstructured meditation and do much better with an instructor whose guidance helps them maintain their focus on bodily sensation, while modulating arousal with breathing exercises" van der Kolk et al., 2014
- Be sure to seek feedback from client.

Developing an Imaginal "Safe-Place"

- Can be used in several ways:
  - If CYP gets too upset during the work, they can signal and you can help them to bring up their safe place.
  - Can be used at the end of sessions to make sure they feel better when they leave.
  - CYP can use it between sessions if something makes them feel bad.