Treating Traumatized Immigrant and Refugee Youth

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Evidence-Based Treatments

• Kid NET: individual; youth; variety of settings
• UCLA Trauma Grief Components Therapy: group; adolescents; schools
• Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: individual; youth +/- parent; variety of settings

COMMON ELEMENTS ACROSS THESE MODELS
Common Elements of EBT

- Optimize or develop resiliency skills
- Master, process and contextualize trauma experiences
- Move forward: reestablish optimal developmental trajectory

OPTIONAL
- Address traumatic grief issues
- Include parent/caretaker in treatment
Cultural Issues

Cultural sensitivity must be used in

- Understanding the nature of the trauma
- Determining group make up
- Understanding meaning of differences (e.g., between treatment provider and youth)

Culture may = gender, ethnic group, religion, region, and/or other factors
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Trauma Informed Interventions: Clinical and Research Evidence and Culture-Specific Information Project

Target Audience
Mental health professionals

Description
General & culture-specific fact sheets on 23 different trauma-focused interventions

Format
Printed manual

Available at http://learn.nctsn.org
Resilience-Building Skills

- UCLA: groups in schools
- Kid NET: does within context of trauma narration
- TF-CBT: with youth and parents (if available) in parallel individual sessions
Resilience Building Skills: Psychoeducation

- Education about refugee, immigrant and other trauma experiences
- Education about trauma, grief, depression, behavior symptoms
- Education about trauma, loss and change reminders and how these may trigger symptoms
- Provide hope for recovery
Reminders

- Trauma reminder: a person, place, smell, song, etc. that reminds the youth of the trauma experience(s) → cue trauma symptoms
- Loss reminder: anything that reminds the youth of the person who died → segue into trauma memories
- Change reminder: anything that reminds the youth of his/her changed circumstances → segue into trauma memories
Resilience-Building Skills: Relaxation

- Recognizing the difference between real danger and conditioned fear responses
- Learning to relax when no danger is present
- Returning to pre-war relaxation, recreation activities
- E.g., sports, music, reading, crafts
- Learning new relaxation skills, e.g., yoga, focused breathing, muscle relaxation skills
Resilience-Building Skills: Affect Expression and Modulation

- Feelings (e.g., fear, sadness) may be viewed as dangerous, weak or cowardly
- Examine cost of shutting out negative feelings (e.g., minimize positive feelings, no longer functional, etc)
- Develop skills for managing negative affect, e.g., negotiating, seeking social support, asking others how they feel, use of relaxation humor, faith, optimism, cognitive skills
Resilience-Building Skills: Cognitive Coping

- Examine connections between thoughts, feelings, behaviors
- Maladaptive thoughts: inaccurate, unhelpful
  - Inaccurate: I should have known the soldiers would kill my father.
  - Unhelpful: You never know when another war will happen.
- Choice: You have control of your thoughts.
Master, Process and Contextualize Trauma Experiences

- Trauma narrative: develop written or other narrative of war, displacement and other traumatic experiences
- Process maladaptive (inaccurate, unhelpful) thoughts
- Contextualize traumatic experiences into broader life experience
- Develop message: how have you changed, what do you want to tell other kids?
Processing Traumatic Grief

- Addressing trauma, loss and change reminders
- What has been lost, unresolved issue with deceased
- Preserving positive memories
- Addressing traumatic memories and beliefs about traumatic death
- Converting relationship, committing to new relationships, moving forward
Moving Forward

- Engage in school
- Make friends; positive peer relationships
- Address issues with work, romantic relationships, regaining healthy trajectory
- Make a plan for the future: who do you want to be beyond a survivor?
- What have you learned that is positive from your experiences?
Including Parents or Caregivers in Treatment

- Are they available?
- Are they willing/able to participate in treatment?
- Consider parent’s trauma issues
- Does the parent know what the youth has experienced?
- Enhancing parental support and MH are strong predictors of adolescent MH
Coping with Trauma, Loss and Change Reminders

- Be aware that reminders will occur
- Make plans for how to cope
- Have back up plans if plan doesn’t work
- Find people to support you
- Give yourself permission to struggle at times
- Keep trying
Special Issues for Immigrant and Refugee Youth

- Unconfirmed death: very common
- Attachment issues: parents or other loved ones are left behind
- Multiple, severe, repeated traumas (e.g., witnessing or being forced to take part in atrocities) → loss of meaning or identity
• Treatment works for youth with PTSD, depression and/or traumatic grief
• EBT have overlapping components
• EBT are brief, cognitive behaviorally-focused
• Provide resilience-building skills and help youth master trauma and loss reminders
• Gain healthy developmental trajectory
• “Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents” CBT-CTG book
• “The Courage to Remember” video and print curriculum available at www.nctsn.org
• “Losing a Parent to Death in the Early Years”: Zero to Three Press
• UCLA Trauma/Grief Treatment for Adolescents: wsaltzman@sbcglobal.com
Maya Angelou:

The world is changed one child at a time.

Thank you for all you do to make the world better.