

THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF TRAUMA

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Our brains are sculpted by our early experiences. Maltreatment is a chisel that shapes a brain to contend with strife, but at the cost of deep, enduring wounds.

- Teicher, 2000

- ✓ The developing brain adapts to a hostile environment.
- ✓ The social brain of the child is stuck in survival mode.
- ✓ Distress and fear leave the child in chronic hyperarousal, unable to calm down or relax.
- ✓ Sensory integration issues often develop, as trauma is experienced through all senses.
- ✓ Traumatic experience interferes with the child's ability to cognitively organize and think through actions.
- ✓ The child has a decreased ability to process, integrate and categorize what is happening.
- ✓ Chronic neglect deprives the infant's sensory system of the input it needs to mature and organize itself. This extreme lack of input results in fewer neuronal pathways available for learning; genetically normal children may be at a permanent intellectual disadvantage (Greenough, Black & Wallace 1987).
- ✓ A trauma response can be triggered at any time through sensory association. If the prior caregiver was the source of the pain, the new attachment relationship can be the trigger for the child.
- ✓ Child trauma can result in serious misunderstandings about safety, personal responsibility, and self concept. It can disorganize and distort the connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and disrupt the encoding and processing of memory. (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008)

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