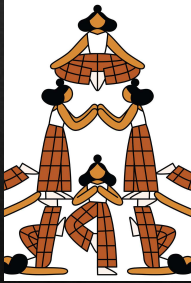


Finding the Client's Story:  
Trauma-Informed Interviewing

Megan Leschak, LMSW  
Capital Habeas Unit Investigator  
Federal Public Defender, Central District of California

Denise Smith, LCSW-C  
Forensic Social Worker and Mitigation Specialist  
Smith Consulting Group



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Trauma

A serious injury or shock to the body,  
as from violence or an accident.

An emotional wound that creates  
substantial, lasting damage to  
psychological development.

An event or situation that causes great  
distress and disruption.



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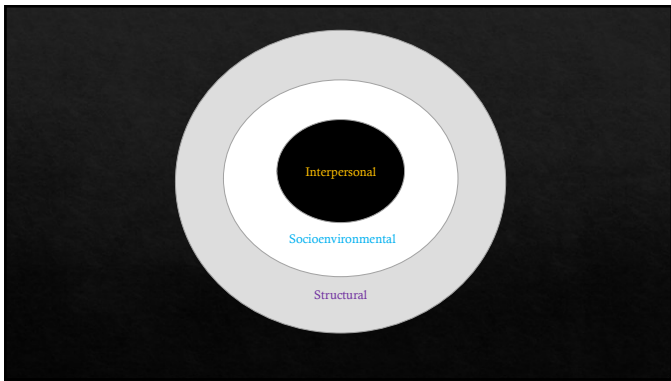
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**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study**

Kaiser Permanente  
1995 to 1997

17,000 members in Southern California receiving physical exams completed confidential surveys

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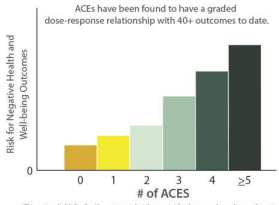
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**ACEs can have lasting effects on....**

-  Health (obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones)
-  Behaviors (smoking, alcoholism, drug use)
-  Life Potential (graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time from work)



ACEs have been found to have a graded dose-response relationship with 40+ outcomes to date.

\*This pattern holds for the 40+ outcomes, but the exact risk values vary depending on the outcome.

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**Original ACEs Study**

- \* Dialogue on impact of childhood trauma
- \* Important subsequent research
- \* Trauma informed concept

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## Limitations



- \* Only household trauma
- \* No exploration of institutional or socioenvironmental trauma
- \* Conducted with predominately white, upper-middle class insured patients

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## Environmental and Socially Engineered Traumas



- ◆ Exposure to toxins
- ◆ Lack of resources
- ◆ Exploitation
- ◆ Substandard living and educational settings
- ◆ Witness to violence and substance abuse
- ◆ Traumatic encounters with law enforcement and the carceral system
- ◆ Institutional oppression
- ◆ Gaslighting

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## Racialized Trauma



"The answer to why so many of us have difficulties is because our ancestors spent centuries here under unrelenting brutal conditions. Generation after generation, our bodies stored trauma and intense survival energy and passed these on to our children and grandchildren."

*Resmaa Menakem, My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies.*

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**Intergenerational Trauma**  
Exposure leads to changes in attachment in children

**Multigenerational Trauma**  
Exposure leads to changes in attachment in children and grandchildren

**Transgenerational Trauma**  
Exposure leads to changes in attachment in children, grandchildren, and subsequent generations to impact to the future

**GOVERNMENT VIOLENCE AND STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION**  
Historical Trauma and Epigenetics

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## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Common Symptoms**

- ◆ Nightmares
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Phobias
- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Emotional numbness
- ◆ Substance abuse (self-medicating)
- ◆ Somatization
- ◆ Intrusive thoughts and flashbacks
- ◆ Hypervigilance
- ◆ Hyper/hypoarousal
- ◆ Dissociation
- ◆ Avoiding all reminders of trauma
- ◆ Sense of foreshortened future

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## Polyvagal Theory

*The Polyvagal Theory provided us with a more sophisticated understanding of the biology of safety and danger, one based on the subtle interplay between the visceral experiences of our own bodies and the voices and faces of the people around us. It explains why a kind face, or a soothing tone of voice can dramatically alter the way we feel.*

Bessel van der Kolk

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### Cultural Humility

- What do I think about this cultural group?
- How do I know this to be "true"?
- What are my biases?
- What are my biases based on?
- How can I ask questions in a curious, yet humble manner?
- Who else can teach me?
- What are the consequences in my relationship with this person/community, if I act on my biases?
- What can I learn here?

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### Trauma Informed Five Principles


**Safety:** Ensuring as much physical and emotional safety as possible considering institutional setting.

**Transparency and Trustworthiness:** Explain what you are doing and why ~ roadmap.

**Choice:** Providing options and autonomy as much as possible.

**Collaboration and Mutuality:** We will work as a team.

**Empowerment:** Take every opportunity to acknowledge resilience ~ trauma growth!



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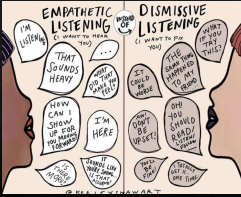
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### Preparing for an Interview or Meeting

- ◆ How are you emotionally, physically, and spiritually?
- ◆ Are you able to be fully present?
- ◆ Do you have time limitations?
- ◆ What do you want to get out of the meeting?
- ◆ Are your expectations reasonable?
- ◆ How will you modify, if necessary?



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ONCE UPON A TIME

**Narrative Therapy: Storytelling as Healing**

Narrative therapy is a style of therapy that helps people become - and embrace being - an expert in their own lives. There is an emphasis on the stories we develop and carry with us through our lives. As we experience events and interactions, we give meaning to those experiences and they, in turn, influence how we see ourselves and our world.

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**Questions**

1. Were you physically abused as a child?  
 Trauma Informed:  
 \* How were you punished as a child?  
 \* What types of things did you get punished for?
2. Is your family close?  
 Trauma Informed:  
 \* When you were upset as a child, what would you do?  
 \* Describe a typical weekday night in your home at age 6, 10, and/or 16.  
 \* A typical Saturday? Holiday?

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**Questions**

3. I know your neighborhood. It is pretty rough.  
 Trauma Informed:  
 \* How would you describe your neighborhood?  
 \* Talk me through a walk to the corner store/park/friend's house. What did you see, hear, and smell along the way?  
 \* Tell me about your early experiences with law enforcement.
4. Were you a good student?  
 Trauma Informed:  
 \* Did you feel safe at school?  
 \* When you had questions with your homework, who did you go to for help?  
 \* Can you name a particular class or teacher you enjoyed? Why?

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### Grounding Techniques

- ◊ Hands in water
- ◊ Move body: walk, stretch, or jump
- ◊ Draw an outline of your feet on the floor in your mind
- ◊ Breathing exercises: box method
- ◊ Recite something: song or poem
- ◊ Use math or numbers
- ◊ Imagine leaving painful feelings behind - packed up in a box while you walk or bike away
- ◊ Art/coloring book



5 - things you can see  
 4 - things you can feel  
 3 - things you can hear  
 2 - things you can smell  
 1 - thing you can taste

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### Practice

#### PARTNER ACTIVITY

- You will have five minutes to interview your partner, followed by two minutes of feedback.
- **Interview Question:** Tell me about a person who impacted your life in a very important way.

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