WHAT IS TRAUMA

– A sudden, unexpected, non-normative event that overwhelms the person’s perceived ability to cope and overpowers usual defensive systems
– Most debilitating feature appears to be the perceived sense of loss of control and personal power

WHAT IS PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder): 3 main clusters of symptoms:

1. Re-experiencing the traumatic event
   • Intrusive, upsetting memories of the event
   • Feelings of intense distress when reminded of the trauma
   • Intense physical reactions to reminders of the event (e.g. pounding heart, rapid breathing, nausea, muscle tension, sweating)

2. Avoiding reminders of the trauma
   • Avoiding activities, places, thoughts, or feelings that remind you of the trauma
   • Inability to remember important aspects of the trauma
   • Feeling detached from others and emotionally numb
   • Sense of a limited future

3. Increased anxiety and emotional arousal
   • Difficulty falling or staying asleep
   • Difficulty concentrating
   • Feeling jumpy and easily startled
   • Irritability or outbursts of anger
   • Hypervigilance (on constant “red alert”)

Symptoms of children who have witnessed DV &/or suffered abuse

• Physical symptoms- headaches, tummy aches, etc
• Depression/ Suicidality/ Sadness
• Anxiety/ Fears and phobias
• Nightmares, insomnia
• ADD/ ADHD symptoms- Distractibility, Difficulty concentrating, difficulty focusing; hyperarousal/ hypervigilence
• Poor school performance/ Learning problems
• Shame & Guilt- children believe they are to blame
• Traditional Gender roles
• Difficulty handling conflict/ Aggression
• Anger/ acting out
• Depression/ acting in
• Exaggerated need for control/ Bullying; poor conflict resolution skills; Poor coping skills
• Excessive Clinginess to mom &/or Excessive Aggression/ disrespect towards mom
• Avoidance; Isolation from others &/or activities
• Secrecy/ Lying - Children are taught not to talk about it/ to cover up
• Low self-esteem/ Lack of confidence
• Delays in verbal, cognitive, motor abilities
• May be emotionally numb, disconnected, or dissociate (appear “spaced out”)
- Low frustration tolerance/ irritability
- Feelings of helplessness & powerlessness
- Substance abuse/ Eating disorders; Cutting/ self-injury
- Overly responsible/ parentified; Perfectionism
- View of their mother- incompetent, weak, vulnerable, needs protection; to blame for abuse
- View of themselves- weak, powerless, helpless; to blame for abuse
- View of their father- love/ hate, precarious attachment; trust vs. mistrust; anger/ want to be like or emulate him

Batterers as Parents
- Undermining the victim’s authority- inherent in domestic violence: Humiliate her in front of the children- Degrading language, name calling, blaming; overrule her decisions
- Punish her in front of the children if questioned
- Create tension between mother and children-”mom too strict”/ “just ignore her” Communicate to children mother is not competent, out of control, not treating them well
- Authoritarian/ Controlling/ Rigid/ Demands Strict Obedience
- Difficulty/inability to make adjustments in parenting
- Poor boundaries
- Entitlement; Self Centeredness
- Feel justified in steps to maintain position of power—violence, bullying
- Expect Family life to center on meeting their needs
- Involving the children/ forcing them to participate in the abuse
- Many times the maltreatment of the children is intended to hurt and intimidate their partner
- High correlation between sexual abuse of their children- poor boundaries, children as property, objectification of women/ girls The risk of physical abuse of the children rises w/the severity and frequency of the batterer’s violence towards his partner

Victims as Parents
- Victims can be as nurturing as any other parent
- Try to compensate for the batterer
- Difficulty setting boundaries/ limits
- Preoccupied with meeting batterers’ needs (avoiding abuse)- unavailable to their children
- Ability to protect her children/Ability to protect herself
- Can confuse age appropriate behaviors of children w/ that of the abuser
- May feel abused/ disempowered by “helpers”

Some facts about the impact of DV on Children:
- According to the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse, domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in this country
- According to a 1993 National Crime Statistics report, 90% of battered women report that their children were present while they were beaten. -Each year between 3.3- 10 million children witness domestic violence incidents in their homes.
- Witnessing domestic violence is the most significant risk factor of transmitting violence multigenerationally (Break the Cycle, 2006).
- According to Strauss, Gelles & Smith, men who witnessed domestic violence as children are twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children (1990).
Little Victims: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children
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