

TRAUMA: CONSIDER THE IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

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Childhood Trauma:

“The experience of an event by a child that is emotionally painful or distressful, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects.”

The National Institute of Mental Health (USA)

Introduction

Studies have shown that beginning from childhood to adulthood; trauma has an impact on altering the way people perceive themselves, the world, how they behave, process information and responds to their surroundings. Therefore, without sufficient intervention, these behaviors and cognitive responses may defy the learning processes and introduce uncertain behaviors. It is fundamentally essential for schools to offer trauma-centered intervention to its traumatized students to mitigate the learning hurdles experienced by students manifesting trauma-related symptoms.

Discussion

Recent epigenetics, psychological and neurological inquiries have all unanimously reinforced that trauma has a significant impact on the student academic achievement. Levine (2007) in his studies described that a child's vulnerability to traumatic occurrence leads to ineffective attention, inadequate language proficiency, organizational skills, and poor memory. All these elements are integral to a student's achievement in school. A survey study carried out at a Boston high school in 2004 corroborated this assertion. Jones and Mudd (2006) confirmed that 89 percent of students had endured some form of violence, 44 percent were victims of violence. The study inferred that the soaring scale of violence was related to trauma, and the students who encountered this manifested truancy behavior and reported weak grades in school. Schore (2001) demonstrate that learning to write, read, solve mathematical problems and engage in discussion is all correlated to fundamental foundations in a student. The foundations encompass trust, learning, engagement, memory, comprehension, and organization.

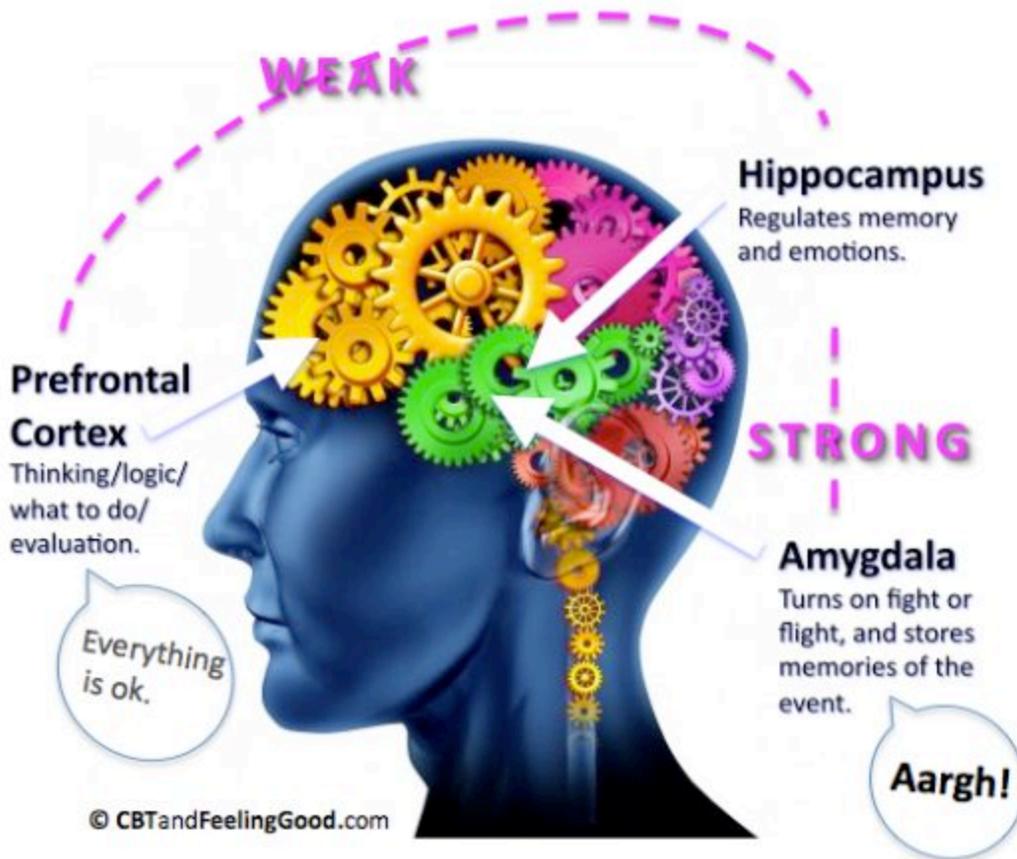
Furthermore, an imperative for succeeding in the classroom is having the aptitude for self-regulated behavior, emotions, and attention. Therefore, it is not shocking that trauma has the likelihood of crippling a student's composition of these dependencies for learning. Yang and Clum (2000) show that trauma weakens communication and language construction skills hindering the logical development of a judgment of self, endangers the student strength to attend to classroom directions and duties, opposes the student gain of new information and the capability to secure her/ himself. All of the elements mentioned above are indispensable for processing information by a student in the classroom. Children who experience trauma regard school as a battleground and they view the world to be a vulnerable place. This theory plays a

role in subverting their inherent capabilities of being calm and in control of their habits in the classroom (Levine, 2007). This discomfort causes students to develop a behavioral mechanism for coping to feel safe and be in control. Interesting, however, is that to teachers, the behaviors formed might be frustrating. In other words, such actions sometimes attract incensed reprisals. These reactions can either weaken or strengthen the student's expectations of threat and confrontation and strengthen a student's negative self-image (Schoore, 2001).

The effects of traumatic events on classroom behavior arise from discrete problems that create difficulties in academic performance (Nixon et al., 2004). The effects deny a student the ability to process social prompts and to represent their feelings appropriately. This form of behavior is confusing, and students' enduring the behavioral impacts of trauma is often misinterpreted. It is therefore important to realize that regardless of whether a student has experienced traumatic incidents, student's behavioral acknowledgment to these events largely contributes to a constrained association with peers and teachers as well as lost time in learning. Studies have illustrated that a child's struggle with traumatic stress is connected with an uneasy relationship with adults and it has an inherent bearing on their relationship with peers and the school administration (Yang & Clum, 2000). Thus, preoccupied with their emotional and physical security, students who have endured traumatic events may show restrained trust from adults and their peers. They may also be unsure of the role of school staff and security personnel in general. Another way to illustrate this is that in such a scenario, a student undergoes trauma as a conscious experience, and later as a cognitive occurrence (Jones & Mudd, 2006). Therefore, a student whose safety is not assured finds it a challenge to embrace learning. They also confront barriers to mastering uncomplicated concepts until the sense of safety, cognitive processes and healthy behaviors return to a pre-trauma level (Yang & Clum, 2000). The student may also experience prolonged development regarding age-appropriate social abilities. The children may be limited to initiating and nurturing healthy interpersonal bonds with their peers and teachers.

In their work Nixon, et al. (2004) noted that trauma has a significant impact on an emotional being of a student. It affects the brain causing an impact on a student's learning process. Nixon et al. (2004) revealed that the cortisol, which is a stress hormone, is discharged in the brain creating diverse forms of feeling. In a typical circumstance, when incidences causing stress fades, the neurotic parasympathetic system in the brain responds and normalizes the body. However, during a traumatic encounter, which is a result of a considerable mass of stress, excess cortisol is discharged into the body.

Therefore, Schoore (2001) asserts that the vast mass of cortisol discharged negatively alters the brain of a student destroying the CA4 neurons in the hippocampus which eventually affect the student learning process.



The effects of trauma on the hippocampus are harmful to a student. It inhibits the student's capability of producing new memories, therefore, affecting the ability of the student to learn. A verbal learning process is impacted because a student cannot retain information collected from verbal sources as opposed to visual. Similarly, the attention of the student is also affected. Jenkins, Langais et al. (2000) acknowledges that the student's attention is affected, although the selective awareness used to process sensory memories into short-term memories is not changed. A blend of emotional challenges occasioned by trauma and the physiological deterioration can deter the performance of a child in school. It is therefore vital to possibly coordinate lesson plans with the help of another professional who understands the concept of trauma-informed care to assist students facing such challenges.

In conclusion, trauma is a severe condition which affects the student learning process and performance in school. It challenges the organizational and language skills of a student. Besides, it makes students strain when nurturing a relationship with peers and educators as well. It is imperative for the school administration to offer appropriate learning and counseling sessions to the affected students. These sessions can aid them to cope and improve their learning activities.

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