Trauma Responses with Indigenous Youth

Brittany Vincze, BA/BSW, RSW and Brittany Madigan, MSW, RSW
De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre

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Who We Are

- Child and Youth Mental Health Counsellors
- Registered Social Worker
- Services for ages 6-24
- Hamilton and Brantford sites
- Individual counselling in an interdisciplinary setting
- Training in Trauma Counselling, CBT, Play Therapy, DBT
Colonization and Trauma

• Disease
• Indian Act 1876
• Reserve system
• Residential school
• 60’s scoop
• Racist laws
• Current policies disadvantage Aboriginal communities
Intergenerational Trauma

• Transmission of historical oppression to communities, families, and individuals
• Passing down the trauma and maladaptive coping patterns associated with it
• Contributes to mental illness, suicide, addictions, violence, loss of culture, loss of language, insecure attachments
Intergenerational Trauma

- Indigenous youth are 3-6 times more likely to die by suicide than non-Indigenous youth
  - Suicide accounts for almost ¼ of all deaths among Indigenous youth
- Over 90% of residential school survivors have abused alcohol after leaving school
- 82.6% of residential school survivors have abused an intimate partner
Trauma: An Experience Like No Other

- PTSD is the most commonly diagnosed mental illness for Indigenous people
- Intergenerational trauma creates risk for insecure attachment, in turn creating a greater risk of experiencing a heightened level of distress when facing trauma
Understanding Indigenous culture

- Circular, holistic
- Importance of our relationships with each other, all living beings, the land, spirituality
- Values giving thanks, humbleness, humour, living in balance, caring for one another
- Values non-interference, sharing, accountability for one’s actions
- Story-telling, sharing circles, ceremony, role modelling are integral to culture
Healing from an Aboriginal Perspective

- Need for community connection
- Need for clear understanding of Aboriginal identity
- Need to approach healing holistically
- Need to have healthy relationships with the counsellor, family, and community
Healing from Aboriginal perspective

- Two-eyed seeing
- Seeing individual as part of family, community culture – trauma experienced on all levels
- Decolonization of the client
- Decolonization of the counsellor
Wellness Assessment

- Medicine wheel used as a method of assessment of a client's overall wellness
- Mental health not separate from other areas of wellness
- All areas co-relate and impact one another
- Mental, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects of wellness
Wellness Assessment

Intergenerational Trauma

**Spiritual**
- Suicidal ideation
- Suicide attempts
- Lack of faith
- Lack of relationships
- Lack of self knowing
- Reckless behaviour
- Adjustment challenges
- Identity challenges
- Broken Spirit

**Mental**
- Racing thoughts
- Negative beliefs
- Challenges with memory
- Isolation
- Intrusive images or flashbacks
- Excessive worry or fear

**Emotional**
- Negative feelings
- Lack of support
- Acts of self harm
- Historical trauma
- Negative self talk
- Numb or no feelings
- Anger or rage
- Mood shifts

**Physical**
- Body pain
- Medical diagnosis
- Lack of self care or interest
- Fidgety or can’t relax
- Weight loss or gain
- Sleep disturbance
- Fear of intimacy
- Addiction
Theory in Practice

- therapeutic story telling
- somatic/sensory processing
- cognitive restructuring and the Good Mind
- mindfulness and grounding
Recommendations

• counsellors to be trauma informed
• universal precautions regarding trauma
• use a holistic framework
• competency in history of colonization
• counsellor as a tool, not the expert
• counsellor to work on self decolonization
• Involving family in counselling when possible
Recommendation continued

- social location: tokenism, appropriation
- being an ally: empowerment vs. furthering oppression
- flexibility with number of sessions, length of time spent with clients
- assisting clients with connecting to traditional healing if desired
- advocating within the system for Elders, Indigenous mentors to be part of services
Works cited