

# TF-CBT, Child Traumatic Grief, and the Opioid Epidemic

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# Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Identify ways in which children can be traumatized by parental drug abuse
- Describe how to apply the PRACTICE components to help children overcome traumas related to parental substance abuse
- Identify the grief components of Child Traumatic Grief Treatment
- Describe resources related to parental substance abuse and child traumatic grief



*GENERATION*

# Opioid Epidemic

- Dramatic National increase in opioid addiction and overdose – heroin and prescription opioids
  - CDC reported 33,000 fatal opioid overdoses in 2015 – a 200% increase from 2000
- Hospitals in California treat one opioid overdose every 45 minutes
  - Highest rates in Shasta, Sacramento, Placer, and El Dorado County

The Sacramento Bee, 2016

# Parental Substance Abuse and Child Trauma

- In utero addiction, leading to Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)
  - Withdrawal symptoms include excessive crying, fever, poor feeding, rapid breathing, trembling, and vomiting
- Neglect (physical, emotional, medical, and educational)
- Exposure to parents' drug use and intoxication
- Parental overdose
- Lack of stable home
- Exposure to other traumas (sexual and physical abuse, domestic violence, car accidents)
- Separation from parents
  - Removal by child welfare
  - Parental incarceration

# Paula

- Paula is a 10-year-old girl whose parents have been using heroin since she was five years old. She experienced chronic neglect, and her father has been in and out of jail for the past several years. Paula and her younger siblings were removed from her mom's care when mom overdosed in front of them. Paula called 911, and mom was hospitalized and recovered. Paula and her siblings are living with their maternal grandmother. They have supervised visits with their mom, who is inconsistent with visits and has frequent relapses.

# Childhood Traumatic Grief

- When someone close to child dies in a way that is experienced as traumatic by the child, often in a sudden or violent manner
- Child may experience unresolved/complicated grief, depressive symptoms, and PTSD symptoms
- Child cannot go through the normal bereavement process because trauma symptoms interfere

# Resources for Child Traumatic Grief

- CTG Web: <http://ctg.musc.edu/>
- NCTSN: <http://nctsn.org/trauma-types/traumatic-grief>
  - The Courage to Remember/Vale la Pena Recordar
  - Information on CTG for parents/caregivers, school personnel, media, and pediatricians
  - Sibling death
- Sesame Street: <https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief>
- Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families: <http://www.dougy.org/>
- <http://www.griefnet.org/>
- The Invisible String – Patrice Karst



# Traumatic Grief Reactions

- Intrusive memories of the death
  - Nightmares
  - Guilt or self blame about how the person died
  - Recurrent or disturbing thoughts about how the person died
- Avoidance and numbing
  - Withdrawal
  - Acting as if not upset
  - Avoiding reminders of the person, the way he or she died, or the things that led to the death
- Physical or emotional symptoms of increased arousal
  - Irritability and/or anger
  - Trouble sleeping
  - Decreased concentration
  - Stomachaches or headaches
  - Hypervigilance
  - Fears about safety for oneself or others

# Patrick

- Patrick is a six-year-old boy whose father Rob recently overdosed on fentanyl. Rob became addicted to opioids after a back injury three years ago. Rob's parents divorced one year ago. He was on a weekend visit with dad when Rob overdosed. Patrick found dad unconscious on the kitchen floor when he woke up in the morning. He called 911, but when the ambulance arrived, Rob was already dead. Mom has conflicted feelings about Rob but feels guilty for not being able to help her ex-husband and for the fact that her son was exposed to the trauma of witnessing his father overdose. Patrick becomes very upset whenever anyone mentions his father and when he encounters anything that reminds him of his father. He has become very clingy with mom and has frequent nightmares.

# Psychoeducation

- Education about trauma and trauma reactions
- Education about parental substance abuse: [https://selfesteemshop.com/product-category/substance-abuse/?filter\\_audience=children](https://selfesteemshop.com/product-category/substance-abuse/?filter_audience=children)
- Education about other relevant traumas
  - Neglect
  - Abuse
  - Entering the child welfare system
- Childhood Traumatic Grief: include education about overdose/cause of death

# Parenting Skills

- Children may be parentified
- Anger at parent(s) may be displaced onto other caregivers
- Children may not be used to structure and limits
- Child Traumatic Grief: change of caregivers/roles, other family members grieving

# Relaxation

- Education about trauma and hyperarousal
- Important to teach children healthy, positive ways to relax
- Work with caregivers to role model healthy skills and reinforce practice/homework
- Child Traumatic Grief:
  - Choose imagery that does not trigger memories of the deceased
  - Relaxation skills to cope with fears and separation anxiety

# Affective Expression and Modulation

- Focus on emotional regulation and active coping skills vs. numbing or avoidance
- Normalize ambivalence
- Create safety/coping plans
- Child Traumatic Grief:
  - Pleasant activities/safe places may be trauma/loss reminders
  - Thinking of the deceased may trigger memories of how s/he died
  - Use neutral scene/memory for thought replacement

# Affect Expression and Modulation with Paula and Patrick

- Paula has a hard time acknowledging painful feelings but withdraws after scheduled visits with mom and has been picking at her skin, causing visible scratches.
- Patrick becomes aggressive at school when peers talk about their dads. He throws frequent tantrums at home, especially when mom has to go to work.

# Trauma Narration

- Plan out the “chapters,” incorporating all relevant traumas
  - Gradual exposure: start with easier parts and lead up to the worst part
  - Life narratives: include positive life events
- Child Traumatic Grief:
  - Intro may not include family life before trauma if that’s too painful
  - Context of the death – the day when it happened or child found out
  - Gradually include facts of what happened, including sensory details and worst moments
  - Fantasy vs. reality
  - How the child has changed since the person died



# Ready to Remember: Jeremy's Journey of Hope and Healing

<http://www.nctsn.org/products/ready-remember-jeremys-journey-hope-and-healing>

# Rosie Remembers Mommy: Forever in her Heart

<http://nctsn.org/products/rosie-remembers-mommy-forever-her-heart>

# Cognitive Processing of the Traumatic Event(s)

- Address themes of responsibility/guilt/self-blame
- Explore and address issues related to self-worth, self-concept and self-esteem
- Identify and challenge distortions related to trust and safety
- Child Traumatic Grief:
  - Rescue/revenge fantasies
  - Responsibility for the death
  - Factors which may make it hard for kids to understand that the person is really dead
  - “What would the person have wanted to tell you?”

# In Vivo Mastery of Trauma Reminders

- Identify trauma reminders and develop coping plans with client and caregiver
  - *What are some potential trauma reminders for Paula? For Patrick?*
- Develop desensitization plan to address gross avoidant behavior
  - *What would be some appropriate steps to address Patrick's separation anxiety with mom?*

# Conjoint Child-Parent Sessions

- Child may have loyalty conflicts
- Relative caregivers may have conflicted feelings and/or guilt
- Caregiver can reinforce accurate and helpful cognitions
- Child Traumatic Grief:
  - Relatives who are grieving at a different pace
  - Supports for grieving caregivers
  - Involving other family members to promote family healing

# Enhancing Future Safety and Development

- Address safety concerns and create safety plans
  - Incorporate trauma reminders and high-risk behaviors
- Education about substance abuse and peer pressure
- Future goals for client and family

# Grief-Focused Components: Grief Psychoeducation

- General info about grief and death
  - How, when, and why people die
  - What happens to the body
  - Focus on child and family's beliefs (role of culture, religion, rituals, myths)
  - Help caregiver talk directly with child about death
  - Address and normalize feelings associated with death
  - Stressors and changes as result of death
- Resources: Sesame Street: When Families Grieve, NCTSN  
Video: It's OK to Remember

# Grief Psychoeducation

## (continued)

- Developmental considerations
  - Handouts for parents about kids' understanding of death at different ages
- Grieving process
  - Education – no timeline or set order
- Secondary adversities
- Feelings of safety
  - Need for a lot of reassurance



# Grieving and Ambivalent Feelings

- Explore what is missed
- Look toward the future
- Resolve ambivalent feelings
- Normalize the child's and caregiver's feelings
- Healing letter or conversation with person's soul/spirit
- Help child work through guilt about his/her feelings and any related distortions
- Deal with negative aspects of the relationship

# Preserving Positive Memories

- Resolution of traumatic aspects allows child to access positive memories
- Goal: help child find comfort, re-experience joy, and give self permission to feel happy again
- Creating a positive memory keepsake
- Involving others – collect memories, reconnect with social network
- Continuing with memories – sharing with family
- Holding a memorial service (incorporate cultural/religious rituals)

# Redefining the Relationship

- Recommitting to new relationships
- Redefining relationships – what is in past vs. what is still available
- Connecting with others
- Finding and letting others into your life
- Personalizing and integrating relationships

# Treatment Review and Closure

- Assessing progress
- Conduct closing joint session – share memory keepsake or hold memorial service or ritual
- Preparing for future: predict, plan, and permit
- Termination



# “I’ll Be There”



# Questions



# Contact Information

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