

**A Holistic Approach to the Urban Child's Trauma:  
From the Eyes of the Beholder  
Fifth Annual Urban Child Symposium**

**Children and Teens Suffering the Trauma  
of Family Transitions**



National *Family*  
*Resiliency* Center

**Risa Garon, LCSW-C, BCD, CFLE**

**Executive Director and Clinician**

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# NFRC Services

- Parent Education in English and Spanish
- Children's Education KidsConnex®
- Individual/Family therapy
- Group therapy for Children and Adults
- Couples therapy:
  - -Premarital
  - -Marital
  - -Remarriage
  - - Separation/ Divorce
- Co-parent Consultation
- Parent Plans
- Collaborative Divorce
- FamilyConnex© On Line Parent Plan Program
- Books for Children
- Books for Parents
- Professional Training



# Reasons for Trauma

## Perception of Divorce

### ■ Grief

- Emotional reactions
- Fear of losing child

### ■ Tribes

- Judicial
- Legal
- Therapeutic
- Extended Family

### ■ Mental illness

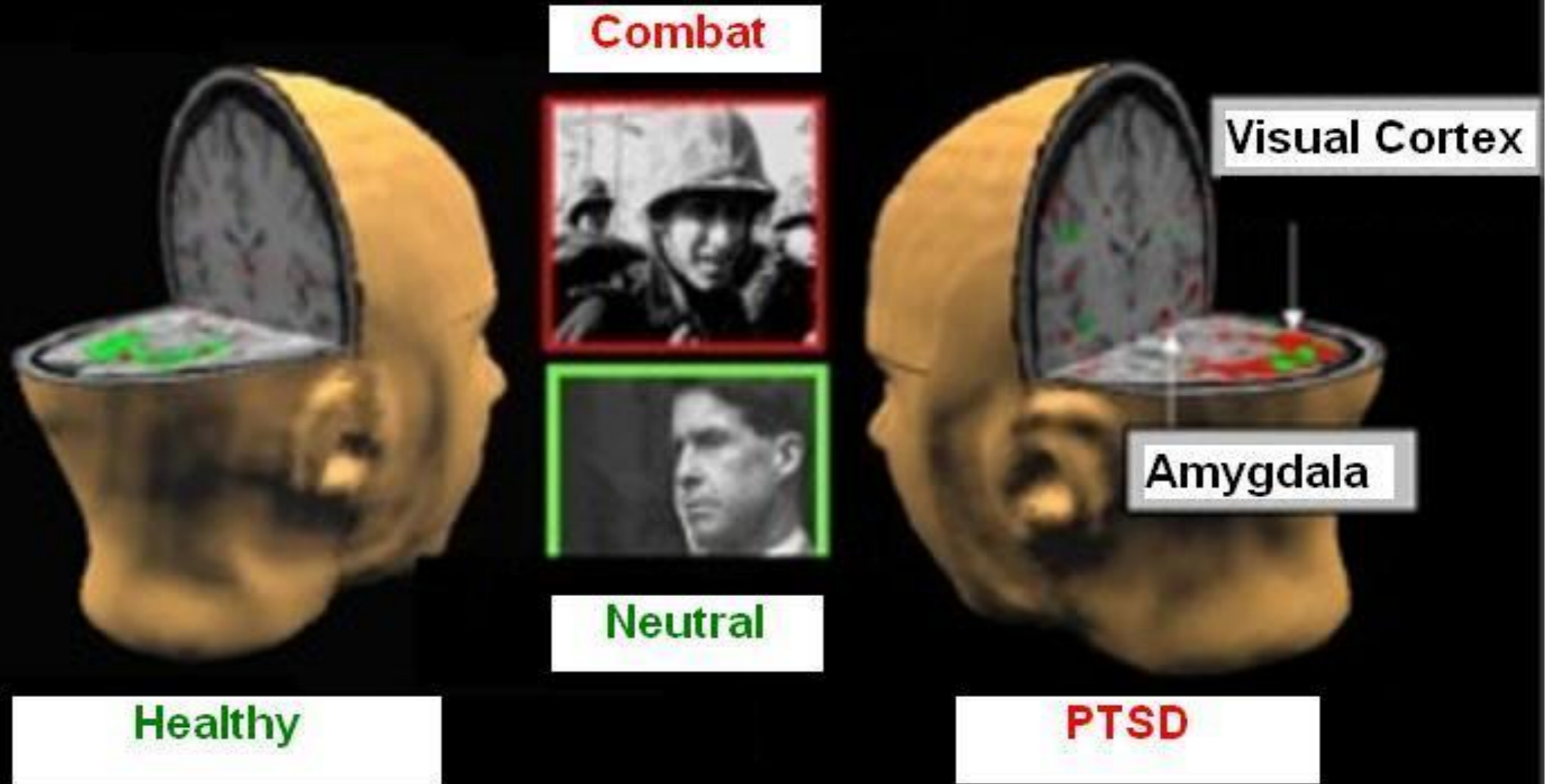
### ■ Substance use/abuse

### ■ Domestic Violence

### ■ Children's Challenges

# Neurological Impact of Grief

## Neural Tissue Impact of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)





# Losses for Adults

- Loss of expectations, “picture of family”
- Loss of intimate partner and companion
- Loss of financial security
- Loss of identity as adult partners; parent
- Loss of daily and routine contact with child
- Loss of extended family and friends
- Loss of shared parenting
- Loss of future security



# Men and Grief

“...In my crazed and somehow enraged state I was screaming inwardly for the one thing I could never be granted: to have the world as I had known it restored to me. And at the same time I wanted to destroy the world that had hurt me in this way: My mind kept filling with images of myself tearing at walls, at buildings, at people, destroying, hurting, killing even. Mad, unquestionably; but what alternative was there?”

*John Tittensor, Year One*

Men & Grief: A Guide for Men Surviving the Death of a Loved One: A Resource for Caregivers and Mental Health Professionals

Carol Staudacher, New Harbinger Publications, 1990



# Bitter Obsession

“There’s a period - a long period- when injured people are even homicidally angry. They want to hurt someone. They’re interested in retribution: “Someone must pay! I cannot accept that I am hurt with impunity, because that means that, somehow, they don’t matter.”

*Molly Layton*

From: Family Therapy Network Nov/Dec, 1998



# Losses for Children

- Loss of family structure
- Loss of time with each parent
- Loss of sense of safety and security
- Loss of routines, traditions
- Loss of family home
- Financial loss
- Changes in neighborhood/school
- Loss of extended family
- Loss of innocence



# Children's and Teen's Responses to Parents' Conflict

- Children and teens whose parents are in conflict can:
  - become hyper-vigilant
  - dissociate from emotions
  - enact scripts
  - have developmental delays





# Scripts that Children Learn in Conflict

- My feelings and thoughts are the same as my parent's.
- I can't love both parents at the same time.
- There is no one there for me.
- I have no control over my life.
- Love is conditional.
- It doesn't matter how I grow up.
- Any time I have an opinion, one parent says my other parent taught me to think that way.

# NFRC Peer Counselors on Parental Conflict

- Conflict is an “addiction.”
- Parents are hypocrites.
- We become the parents, the parents the kids.
- Why me, why now?



“In my room” by Jenny, age 16



# My Trauma – Age 16

- I lost my childhood.
- My parent held onto me for my parent's need; I didn't know how to handle any part of my life.
- I lost my other parent. He died of alcoholism.
- My other parent threw out the special gift my deceased parent made for me.
- I don't know what it is like to be part of a healthy family. I love my relatives taking care of me; I am always anxious that I will let them down.
- I feel guilty that I left my siblings behind.
- I was an adult in my old family; I am referred to as a kid now. I have lost the freedom I once had.



# My Trauma – Age 13

- I was sexually abused by my parent.
- I tried not to say anything but it was all I could think about; I started having nightmares.
- I learned that I was the parent for my parent.
- I stayed up late each night waiting for my parent to come home drunk.
- I was the caregiver for my parent.
- My parent used me as a trophy.



# My Trauma – Age 7

- I am scared all the time.
- I love sports but my parents fight so much that I just freeze when I see them at the same event.
- I think I am the cause of the divorce.
- I am thinking about drowning myself in the bathtub; it hurts too much.



# Strategies to Help Children Cope

- Validate Feelings
- Educational Programs:
  - Teach coping skills
    - Communication
    - Problem solving
    - Conflict resolution
- How to seek help and support
- Provide mentors



# Strategies to Help Parents Cope

## ■ Parents

- Pre-relationship education
- Parenting education prior to separation
- Co-parent education for separated parents

## ■ Early Intervention

- Assess at beginning of family transition
- Teach parents to focus on family systems
- Accountability
  - Co parent counseling
  - Child focused education
  - FamilyConnex – address needs of children
  - Demonstrate follow through after decisions are made

## ■ Child Focused Decision Making

## ■ Child's Voice



# Components of the Child and Family Focused Model

- I. Developmental Considerations
  - Self-Concept
  - Intellectual Functioning
  - Interpersonal Functioning
  - Safety and Security
- II. Impact of Family Transition on Each Area of Development
- III. Responsible Parenting
- IV. Degree of Conflict Between Parents





# Strategies to Help Professionals

- Provide Prevention Services As Soon as Possible
- Educate, Educate, Educate
  - Child Development
  - Family Dynamics
  - Ecological Model
  - Therapeutic Jurisprudence
- Professional Accountability
  - Mental Health
  - Legal
  - Judicial



# Mending Broken Families : Social Policies for Divorced Families : How Effective are They?

Emily M. Douglas, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2006

“Public awareness campaigns have educated the public about the hazards of driving while intoxicated and the importance of not tolerating family violence. They have encouraged parents to read to their children, stop smoking because of their children, and to stay informed of their children’s after-school activities as a way to prevent drug use. I have yet to see general education or awareness campaigns that remind parents about the importance of keeping both (nonviolent) parents involved in children’s lives, and the benefits to children when parents put aside their differences to focus on their children. Social change results from multiple different efforts: public policy, grassroots efforts, social programming, and general public education. Let our social policies declare that parents should and must work together for the sake of their children.”

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