

# Beyond trauma

Steiner Therese ,MD  
Childpsychiatrist, Switzerland

# Working context

- NGO terre des hommes basel  
Psychosocial support for vulnerable children and youth in southern part of Africa, Middle- and South America
- Own practice in Switzerland:  
Refugees mainly from Eritrea and Afghanistan

# Overview

## First part: therapists

- Some reflections and ideas on what impact it might have if therapists know they work with multitraumatized clients. What to be aware of.

## Second part: clients

- Posttraumatic growth

# Definiton

A psychological trauma is a situation that is perceived as overwhelming and exceeding the personal competence and strength to cope with.

Whether a situation is experienced as traumatic or not depends on intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

A situation that is experienced as traumatic influences the self-awareness and destabilizes the conviction of self- efficacy.

# Traumatized clients

Traumatized clients are often perceived as:

- Victim of the difficult situation they have gone through.
- Individuals that need special care and need very much to be cared for.
- Human beings that have resources yet not available in the given moment
- Being helpless, lost, without own ideas, unable to do things.

# Impact on therapist

Therapists seem often to:

- Feel they have to work very hard and understand quickly
- The urge to show high performance and support positive change
- It seems more difficult to hand over expertise
- *'Never do for your clients what they can do for themselves'* .

This important quote by Wittgenstein does not count anymore.

The tendency to do things for clients augments.

# Impact

Many professionals even people with lots of experience are not aware of this specific reaction that might occur when working with traumatized clients.

They get exhausted, worn out, take up lots of responsibility and not before they show an unusual reaction, have the impression to be utilized, they realize that they did not establish co-construction.

# Coated stones

- The metaphor that works well for me: I started to think of traumatized clients as coated stones.
- This metaphor helps me to keep up the resource mindset.
- To go slow and show patience. Accept the client's and my own performance
- Keeps up my believe to work with a ruby or saphir that is hidden underneath a layer of ordinary gray stone.







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# Find the resonance of the metaphor coated stone

Suppose the methapor coated stone has

- Color
- Shape
- touch
- Sound
- Sent
- Movement

# Hand over control and cope with uncertainty

- Traumatized clients have gone through situations they had no control of. That is a good reason to hand over as much control as possible. It helps them realize they have impact again.
- In order to be able to hand over control therapists need to embrace uncertainty.

# The offer of uncertainty

- Hope
- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Courage
- Humility

The tolerance for uncertainty includes

- Awareness of the complexity : it can be like this or different
- Let go and be open for surprise
- The knowledge and acceptance that living systems can not be instructed

# I will do my best

- Steve used to start his sessions by framing it as follows: *'I will do my best and I assume you too. I hope it will be helpful in some way yet there is no guarantee'*.  
In other words Steve started his sessions embracing uncertainty.
- And what is the best? The best is what happens in the very moment of interacting with the client and then hand over the expertise to the client and trust that she/he will make some use of what was said, thought, experienced, done.

# The client determines the method

- Steve used to say: the answer of my client will determine the next question I will ask
- I would like to open that up and say: the reaction of my client shows me which communication channel will work best.

Whether it is the miracle question, explore best hope, an intervention on the doing level like: drawing, rhythms, sayings, acting

- ....important is, that you let you guide by your client and therefore lead from one step behind.

# Positive factors for posttraumatic growth

Factors that influence positively posttraumatic growth are very similar to the factors that characterize resilience:

- Ability to have best hopes
- Ability to imagine steps in the future
- Ability to make a difference between things that can be changed and unchangeable circumstances (problem/limitation)
- Ability to perceive mistakes, failure, relapse as normal, as an important part of life and the precondition for progress and success



# Enhance posttraumatic growth

- The experience of having mastered well difficult situations before
- Be aware of own strength/competence
- Have the expertise handed over, gain control
- Get the opportunity for little success
- The experience of a strong relationship with a stabil binding
- Flexibility and sense of humor
- Spirituality: religion, stories, music, meditation

# Exposure to SFA

## Evaluation youth2youth program

Change from staying at home to being actively involved in some activity

- Earn money:  
62 % youth exposed to SFA  
27 % youth not exposed to SFA
- School attendance/ career aspirations  
50 % exposed to SFA  
38% not exposed to SFA
- Community work:  
79 % youth exposed to SFA  
21 % youth not exposed to SFA

# Exposure to SFA

## Evaluation youth2youth program

Psychoeducation on different topics enhances change from being a victim to gain control over different aspects of own life.

- Personal rights
- HIV prevention
- Birth control
- Domestic violence

# Adapt the miracle question

Adapt the miracle question: While you are sleeping a miracle happens

- And you start to trust that you have competences to ameliorate your situation. How will you find out this miracle has happened?
- And you feel some special energy to do things you wanted to do for a long time
- And you get the idea that you might to want to do something that is helpful for you
- And you can think of what and who may give you support and that you are able to make use of the offered support

# Explore well mastered difficult situation

- What did you do that was helpful?
- How did you get the idea that this could be helpful?
- What else helped you to keep going?
- What would others tell me what you did?

Make sure you focus on the doing level.

Traumatized people even more than others often describe feelings and thoughts.

# Well mastered difficult situations

Clients that have gone through traumatic situations need sometimes more 'closed' questions. They can make use of categories. Think of a difficult situation that you mastered well:

- In your actual life
- As a child
- In your family
- In your professional life

# Resource journey

- Relax and let you surprise by the memory of a good situation you experienced when things were o.k.

Where are you? With whom? How does it look like, where you are? How does it sound? How does it smell? What kind of tactile body sensation do you experience? What do you do?

- What kind of skills do you show in this particular situation? (competence do enjoy, to join in, be creative, keep the overview)

# Quotes/Sayings

- Think of a saying that was important for one of your parent
- Think of a saying that is important for you
- Think of a saying in the context of a difficult situation



# Quotes/sayings

- Two prisoners are looking through the bars, one is looking to the mud the other to the stars
- If you are going through hell keep going (Churchill)
- In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity (Einstein)
- The wound is the place where the light enters
- You can not prevent the birds of sorrow from flying around your head, yet you can stop them from building a nest.

# Quotes

- We have to cope with rain if we want to see a rainbow
- Beyond right and wrong there is a place where we will meet. (Rumi)
- It needs a village to raise a child
- Take care of the minutes and the hours will take care of themselves
- The shell must break before the bird can fly
- Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional (Buddha)

# How do use quotes/sayings

- Ask the client to remember sayings
- Ask the client to act a saying
- Ask the client to draw a saying

Acting and drawing quotes are non verbal powerful methods to connect with the wisdom of a quote.

Example: it takes a village to raise a child  
(Nigeria)

# Rhythms and songs

There is some evidence that rhythms and simple tunes existed before mankind had an elaborated language.

Human beings are the only creatures that have a 'genetic rhythm pulse' that allows them to cooperate.

With other words rhythms have a strong impact on our behavior, influences empathy and the social skill to cooperate

Solution focused song Youth2youth

# How to use rhythms and tunes

- Start the session with some rhythm exercises
- Have the client remember nursery rhymes
- Ask the client about the songs she/he heard from the parents, used to sing during childhood
- Ask the client to find the rhythm that goes well with the actual situation
- Ask the client to find the rhythm or hum, the tone that stands for peace

# Stories

- Jorge Bucay: Wings are for flying
- Jellaludin Rumi: A guest house
- You are right just as you are
- The eagle that would not fly
- Gloria the singing cow