



Supporting children at times of crisis



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www.grievingstudents.org



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Outline of Presentation

- How to support children after a disaster
- Symptoms of adjustment reactions
- Timeline for adjustment
- Professional self-care



Psychological first aid

- Provide broadly to those impacted
- Supportive services to foster normative coping and accelerate natural healing process
- All staff should understand likely reactions and how to help children cope



- ***Anyone that interacts with children can be a potential source of assistance and support – if unprepared, they can be a source of further distress***

PFA Actions (source: American Red Cross)



- Observation or awareness
- Make a connection
- Help people feel comfortable and at ease
- Be kind, calm, & compassionate
- Assist with basic needs
- Listen
- Give realistic reassurance
- Encourage good coping
- Help people connect
- Give accurate and timely information
- Suggest a referral resource
- End the conversation



Basic needs are basic

- UWF (Brief Therapy)
- Need to deal with basic needs before able to address emotional needs
 - Safety, security
 - Food, shelter
 - Communication and reunification with family
- Staff have their own basic needs
 - Crisis plans need to address them as a priority



Potential symptoms of adjustment reactions

- Sleep problems
- Separation anxiety and school avoidance
- Anxiety and trauma-related fears
- Difficulties with concentration
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Regression
- Depression; Avoidance of previously enjoyed activities
- Substance abuse
- Somatization



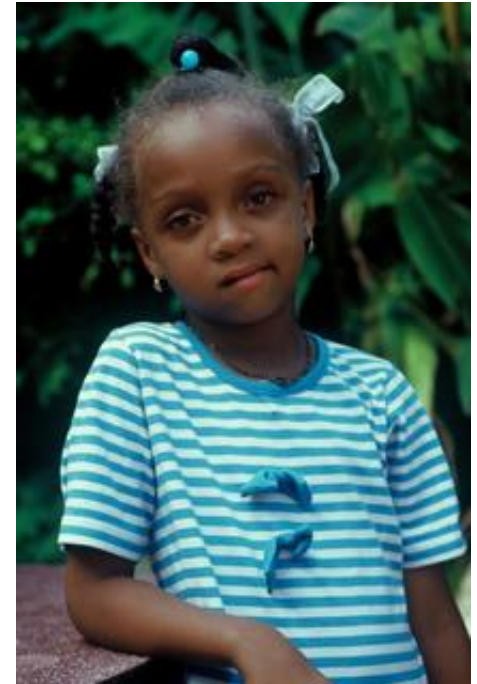
Post-traumatic stress disorder

- Exposure to death, serious injury, or sexual violence
- Re-experiencing traumatic event
 - Recurrent, intrusive, distressing memories
 - Recurrent, distressing dreams
 - Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks); post-traumatic play
- Avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma
- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood
- Increased arousal
 - Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
 - Irritability or anger
 - Self-destructive behavior
 - Hypervigilance or exaggerated startle



Range of reactions to crisis

- Wide range of reactions and concerns
 - Not just PTSD
- Bereavement
- Secondary losses and stressors
 - Relocation
 - Loss of peer network
 - Academic failure
 - New social network
 - Financial stresses
 - Parental stress, mental health problems
 - Marital conflict or domestic violence
- One crisis often awakens feelings related to pre-existing or past crisis





Parents often underestimate symptoms

- Children may withhold complaints because of concerns they are abnormal, or to protect parents who are upset
- Parents may not think professionals are interested or assume “normal reactions to abnormal event”
- Stigma related to mental illness





Adjustment Over Time in Crisis

A = baseline functioning

B = event

C = vulnerable state

D = usual coping mechanisms fail

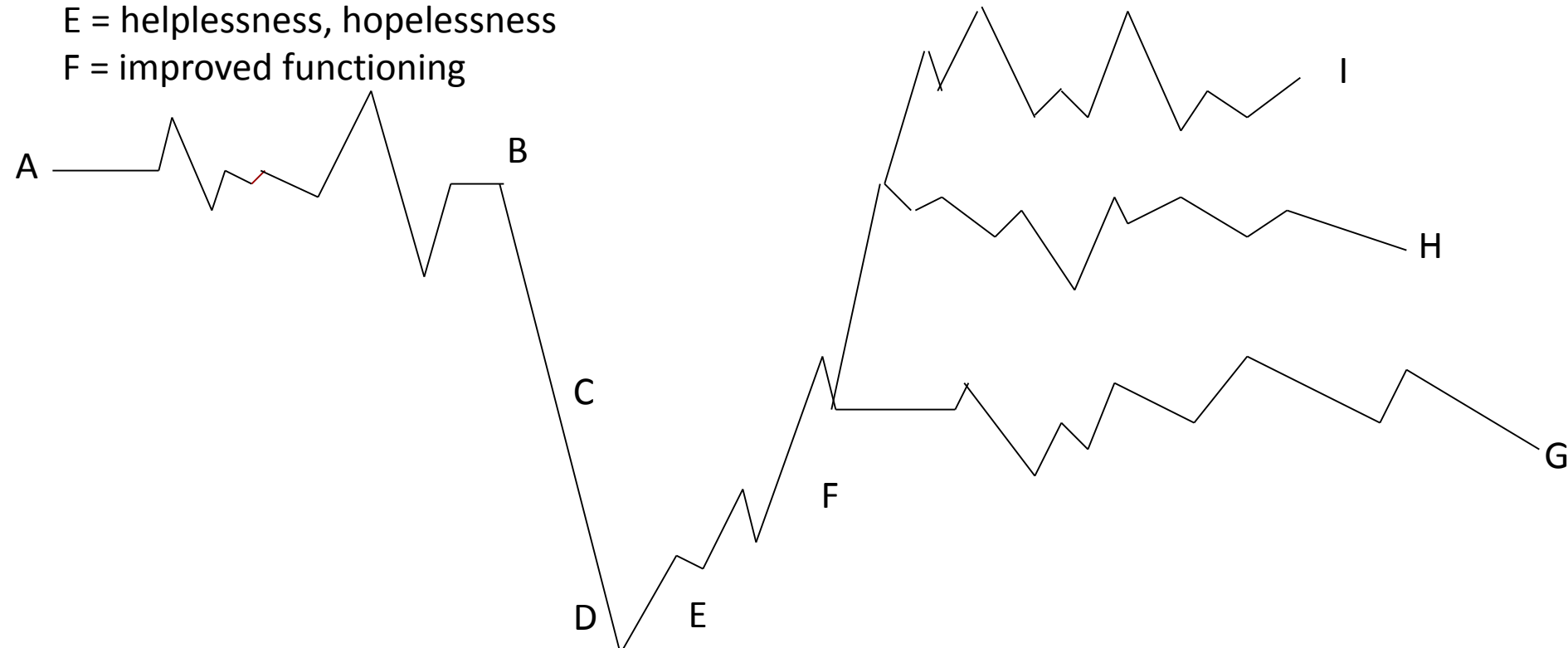
E = helplessness, hopelessness

F = improved functioning

G = continued impairment

H = return to baseline

I = post-traumatic growth





Importance of professional self-care

- Recognize it is distressing to be with children who are in distress
- It's critical staff find ways to have their own personal needs met and appreciate and address impact of supporting children who are grieving or traumatized
- Create a culture where:
 - it is ok to be upset
 - members normalize asking for help and model willingness to accept assistance



Website resources

National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

www.schoolcrisiscenter.org

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National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

Coalition to Support Grieving Students

www.grievingstudents.org



COALITION *to* SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

AAP Children and Disasters – www.aap.org/disasters

– Coping and adjustment:

www.aap.org/disasters/adjustment

www.schoolcrisiscenter.org



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THE NCSCB

Dedicated to helping schools support their students
through crisis and loss

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Materials and guidance for schools
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students

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Help Me Prepare

Resources and guidelines to prepare
to support children in times of crisis
and loss

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[National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement](https://www.linkedin.com/company/national-center-for-school-crisis-and-bereavement)



On-line learning module

National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health
(Psychosocial Impacts of Disasters on Children)

<http://ncdmph.usuhs.edu/KnowledgeLearning/2013-Learning2.htm>