ASSISTING CLIENTS WITH COMPLEX PTSD

Interventions

LaShaun Williams, PsyD
Complex PTSD

Symptom Clusters

- Re-experiencing
- Avoidance/Numbing
- Hyperarousal

- Affective dysregulation
- Impaired attention and consciousness
- Impairment in interpersonal functioning
- Somatization &/or medical problems
- Compromised systems of meaning
Phasic Treatment

• PHASE I
  • Stabilizing safety
  • Psychoeducation
    • Effects of trauma
    • Responses as adaptations
    • Cumulative nature
    • Treatment process
    • Develop therapeutic alliance
  • Reducing symptom acuity

• PHASE II
  • Review and reconstruction of trauma memories

• PHASE III
  • Engagement in community life
SAFETY: Theme of Phase I

What does safety mean?

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Feeling Safe versus Being Safe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Perceived Safety</th>
<th>Actual Safety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress Responses</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vermilyea (2000)
Phasic Treatment

PHASE I

SAFTEY: Theme of Phase I

Survival Mode
- Need to react
- No time to think

Recovery Mode
- Need to respond
- Must Reflect & Consider
Psychoeducation

• Ongoing process
• Facilitates transparency
• Facilitates collaboration
• Reinforces differences in therapeutic relationship
  • OK to ask “Why?”
  • OK to expect explanation
  • OK to expect thoughtfulness
  • OK to question the rationale
  • OK to disagree
### Using the 5 Senses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGHT</th>
<th>SOUND</th>
<th>TOUCH</th>
<th>SMELL</th>
<th>TASTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look around the room</td>
<td>Notice sounds in the room (e.g. fan)</td>
<td>Pillow</td>
<td>Lotions</td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at a specific object</td>
<td>Listen to soft music</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>Scented candles</td>
<td>Gum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice a specific features</td>
<td>Nature sounds</td>
<td>Frozen orange Pets</td>
<td>Essential oils</td>
<td>Mints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. How many blue things?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clean laundry</td>
<td>Ginger candy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grounding

Mentally

• Orienting Self to Present
  • “I am safe.”
  • “Today is Monday, May 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2013”
  • “I’m at my therapist’s office.”

• Observation Games
  • How many windows in this room?
  • How many brown things are there?
  • How many circular things?
  • What’s the distance between me and the bookshelf?
  • What’s the length of the table top?
### Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>SIMILARITIES</strong></th>
<th><strong>DIFFERENCES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In You</strong></td>
<td>Feel scared</td>
<td>Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feel alone</td>
<td>Have help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could get disappointed</td>
<td>More able to handle it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In the Environment</strong></td>
<td>Wish it’s different</td>
<td>Pictures on wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cramped</td>
<td>Lots of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In the Situation</strong></td>
<td>Feel attacked</td>
<td>I made the decision to be here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feel trapped</td>
<td>Not trapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In Others</strong></td>
<td>Have power over me</td>
<td>People listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couldn’t disagree</td>
<td>Can find out the reason why</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Containment Skills

Physical

- temporarily put experiences aside, rather than allowing them to remain unconscious
Containment Skills

Using Imagery

Removing Yourself from the Situation

Safe Places
Containment Skills

Using Imagery

Removing the Distressing Material
Containment Skills

Journaling

• Contains experiences
• Facilitates Other Treatment Activities
• Grounding
• Developing awareness
• Exploration
• Pro’s versus Con’s
Containment Skills

Level 1: surface, factual
- Grounding
- Managing time loss
- Increase awareness of day to day events

Level 2: present thoughts, feelings, impulses
- Therapy assignments
- Containment
- Self soothing

Level 3: present-focused writing related to trauma material

Journaling
Cognitive Restructuring

Challenging Trauma Based Distortions

• Systematically identifying and challenging cognitive distortions and replacing them with more positive and accurate thoughts.

• Can be simple consideration of evidence for and against the thought.

• Can be a more involved process...

“Just because we think it doesn’t make it true.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE/TIME</th>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS</th>
<th>EMOTIONS</th>
<th>RATIONAL RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-At the shelter. No money in my pocket.</td>
<td>“There is nothing to do.” (85%)</td>
<td>Bored (90%)</td>
<td>“Actually, there are plenty of things I could do; for example go to a meeting, write in my journal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Thinking about some people I used to hang with.</td>
<td>“I can’t stand this boredom.” (80%)</td>
<td>Anxious (95%)</td>
<td>“It is not true that there is nothing to do but the pain of boredom makes it hard to see other things I could do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Start craving cocaine.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Belief in automatic thoughts (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Assessing Thoughts: Functional?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpful Thinking</th>
<th>Harmful Thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructive</strong></td>
<td><strong>Destructive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puts you together</td>
<td>Tears you apart &amp; destroys you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I can learn.”</td>
<td>“I don’t know anything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Necessary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unnecessary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps you do what you need to.</td>
<td>Does not change anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To find out if I am HIV +, I need a blood test.”</td>
<td>“What if I’m HIV +?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes you feel better.</td>
<td>Makes you feel worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I can focus on what is good in my life or what I can do.”</td>
<td>“There’s so many things wrong with my life, and there’s nothing that I do about it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Label Dysfunctional Thinking Patterns

- **Overgeneralizations** “She cut me off when I was talking. No one wants to listen to what I have to say.”

- **Personalizations** Taking responsibility for negative events, beyond your control. “I ruined the evening because I chose the restaurant with the bad service.”

- **Dichotomous (All or Nothing) Thinking** “If I can’t make money like I used to, what’s the point in living.”
Label Dysfunctional Thinking Patterns

- **Mind Reading** “The counselor doesn’t like me,... he ignored my question in group.”
- **Negative Future Telling** Thinking that you can see how things will be in the future and it's bad.
- **Negative Mental Filter** Focusing solely on the negative and ignoring the positive.
Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Skills

- Mindfulness
- Affect Regulation
- Distress Tolerance
- Interpersonal Effectiveness
Identifying and Managing Triggers

“Small things set me off, and before I know it, I’m thinking of suicide.”

“When I see someone light up, the world narrows and all I can feel is the need to get high.”

Najavits (2002)
Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Behavior Chain Analysis

1. Describe the specific TARGET EVENT
2. Identify the specific PRECIPITATING EVENTS
3. Explain in general the VULNERABILITY FACTORS influencing the event
4. Describe the CHAIN OF EVENTS leading to the TARGET EVENT
5. Identify the CONSEQUENCES of the event
6. Describe in detail alternative SOLUTIONS
7. Outline in detail PREVENTION STRATEGIES
8. Identify REPAIR options
# Crisis Continuum

## Level of Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF DISTRESS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensations</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Symptom Management/Coping Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom Management/Coping SKILLS</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Impulses</th>
<th>Sensations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</table>
“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

-Victor Frankl (Man’s Search for Meaning)
Bibliography


Bibliography


Bibliography


THANK YOU

LaShaun Annette Williams, PsyD
(202) 361-5992
Drlashaunwilliams.com
info@drlashaunwilliams.com

Image from Louisiana Tech University Counseling