




Trauma in the Family:

A Roadmap of Recovery Through Stress Management and Building a Social Support Network



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Meet the presenters...



Erik Young, M.Ed., LPC – Therapist specializing in Special Needs family therapy and trauma treatment with over 20 years of experience. Owner of Erik Young Counseling LLC. Previously worked as a clinician at Devereux for 13 years. Parent of special needs children. Author of *The Special Needs Parenting Survival Guide*.



Rhiannon Young – Published poet, photographer, musician, honors student at Turning Point Academy, and all around fantastic young woman. Trauma survivor. Erik Young's daughter.



Objectives



- Understand different ways that trauma can manifest within the family system
- Learn and practice stress management techniques that are particularly useful for trauma survivors.
- Learn about the importance of the social support network and how to bolster it to create a healing environment within the family system



Our Story...

- ▶ Erik was professional trained and experienced in dealing with emotional trauma.
- ▶ Erik's wife had a trauma history and periodically sought treatment for it.
- ▶ Rhiannon had a medical history of Allergy/GI issues from a young age (pre kindergarten).
- ▶ At around 11-12 years of age, Rhiannon's medical issues became more complicated despite treatment. Migraines, non specific body pain (RND), "spacing out". Gradually withdrew from preferred sports activities and other preferred activities. Spent increasing time seeing specialist after specialist. Resistant to treatment.
- ▶ Trauma based interventions (EMDR) helped with some of the pain issues.
- ▶ Annual hospitalization for months at a time, feeding tubes, disorder eating.



Continued...

- Erik and wife split up 2 years ago. Erik took over custody and responsibility for managing medical treatments.
- No physical cause for symptoms. Started treating for trauma.
- Within a month, most pain gone. Many of the other physical maladies gone or in remission.
- Increases in anxiety and depression including dissociation.
- Dialectic behavior therapy with medication management and family therapy. Anxiety/depression now well managed.



Rhiannon's perspective...

- ▶ When it first came out that what was happening to me was mental health related, it was hard for me. That had never been something I had to deal with and the idea scared me. I was terrified about what this meant, and what I would have to do to get better. I was worried people would judge me and see me differently, that I would see myself differently. And for a while I did see myself differently and I judged myself even if everyone else wasn't. I didn't want to believe that my problems stemmed from my mental health and I ignored it for as long as I could, but ignoring it didn't make it go away and it didn't help me.
- ▶ It took me a long time to accept that this was now a mental health issue not a medical one and subsequently it took a long time for me to accept help. Sure I was taking the meds, and doing the programs in the hospital but I wasn't doing more than the bare minimum and it wasn't until I accepted it that I started actually getting help. Once I was able to accept all of this I started working my programs instead of just showing up to them I did the work. And it was a lot of hard work, none of it was easy, but all of it was necessary.
- ▶ Today I am graduated from a year and a half of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, I have a whole set of skills to help me when things get hard, and I am doing a lot better. Things aren't perfect, and I still have bad days and bad weeks, but now I am better able to handle them. I know how to manage my self harm urges instead of acting on them. I also know how to better manage my dissociation, and although it's still happens I am in better control of it now. I was able to pass my sophomore year of school, and I was able to manage myself through the challenges that I faced this school year.



Trauma



- ▶ **Trauma** is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. Psychologists can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions.
- ▶ *Adapted from the APA Help Center article, "[Recovering emotionally from disaster.](#)"*



Complex Trauma

- The term complex trauma describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure.
- These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually begin early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child's development and the very formation of a self. Since they often occur in the context of the child's relationship with a caregiver, they interfere with the child's ability to form a secure attachment bond. Many aspects of a child's healthy physical and mental development rely on this primary source of safety and stability.

From <http://www.nctsn.net.org/trauma-types/complex-trauma>



Common Trauma Symptoms

EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension



Red Flags

- History or childhood trauma – Childhood trauma increases the chances of future trauma. Childhood trauma can set the stage for intergenerational trauma (Attachment issues, recreating unresolved trauma in future relationships)
- Isolation -- Withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities, social activities, relationships, etc. May be related to/look like depression.
- Nonspecific medical complaints – Pain not due to a specific cause, GI issues, sleep problems, etc. Medical issues that seem resistant to standard treatment.
- Apparent changes in personality.
- Substance use/addictive behaviors – Self medication.
- Resistance to seeking therapy or dropping out of/frequently changing therapists



Treatments

- ▶ Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavior therapy
- ▶ EMDR (Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing)
- ▶ Dialectic Behavior Therapy
- ▶ Family therapy
- ▶ Attachment based therapy
- ▶ Play therapy (Theraplay, Sand Tray, etc.)
- ▶ Medication management
- ▶ Exposure therapy (for anxiety)
- ▶ Cognitive Behavior therapy (for anxiety and depression)
- ▶ Art Therapy, music therapy



Continued...

- Good trauma treatment will teach emotional/physical regulation skills as well as work on processing the trauma.
- Good trauma treatment should include some level of family involvement as trauma impacts the entire family system.
- Good trauma treatment will include a thorough biopsychosocial assessment to uncover such things as intergenerational trauma and environmental factors.
- Good trauma treatment will include concrete outcome measures and will chart progress towards those goals.



T.I.P.

- ▶ T.I.P. is good for dealing with intense and overwhelming emotions. It is using strong physical sensations to help deal with the strong emotions.
- ▶ **Temperature-** Change your temperature by holding ice, going outside if it is hot or cold, taking a hot shower or bath taking a cold shower.
- ▶ **Intensity-** Typically this stand for exercise but anything that changes the intensity of what you are doing. Do some jumping jacks, go for a run or a jog, you favorite type of exercise, or even play an instrument for as long as you can.
- ▶ **Pressure/Progressive muscle relaxation-** Progressive muscle relaxation is when you tense then relax your muscles throughout your body. The pressure part can be hugging your knees to your chest, or layering blankets over yourself, anything that adds pressure to your body.



Self Soothe/Soothe the Sense

- ▶ Using your five senses to calm down. Being very aware of what is happening around you and what sensations you are perceiving.
- ▶ **Vision** – Photography or art, sitting in nature, watching a candle or lava lamp.
- ▶ **Hearing** – Listen to music, play an instrument, listen to sounds of nature such as birds water or wind.
- ▶ **Smell** – Using your favorite lotion perfume or soap, light a scented candle, bake something, smell flowers, use potpourri.
- ▶ **Taste** – Eat your favorite meal, drink your favorite drink (such a tea, coffee, or hot chocolate), suck on a piece of candy or chew your favorite gum, eat a special food you don't usually buy.
- ▶ **Touch** – Take a warm bath or shower, cuddle in bed under your blankets, hold a stuffed animal, sit in a comfortable chair or sofa, put on lotion, use a cold compress or heating pad, hug someone or pet an animal, put on comfortable clothing.



Demything Emotional Fact

- ▶ Using observable describable facts to work through thoughts and emotions.
- ▶ Changing your thoughts based on the facts of a situation and not the emotions.
- ▶ Instead of saying "Everyone is mad at me." you can say "Just because one person is mad at me does not mean that everyone is mad at me." You can also go to someone and ask "Are you mad at me?" And then say "Not everyone is mad at me because (this person) isn't mad at me."
- ▶ If you think "Other people don't approve of my feelings so I shouldn't feel them." You can stop and change the thought to "I am entitled to my feelings regardless of the opinions of others."
- ▶ If you think "I shouldn't be upset right now." You could stop and look at the situation and say "I am upset right now and there is no right or wrong way to feel. And my emotions are valid even if not everyone feels this way."



Irritating thoughts and Thought Stopping

- ▶ Irritating thoughts are automatic, often subconscious, thoughts that can trigger or are related to strong emotions.
- ▶ Strong emotions tend to erode our ability to stay logical and in control in the face of emotional triggers.
- ▶ When you notice you are starting to have a strong emotion, check in and ask “What’s the thought?”
- ▶ In your mind, yell “STOP!”
- ▶ In that quiet space, replace the irritating thought with a calmer more helpful thought.
- ▶ Practice this as often as necessary.
- ▶ Works well in conjunction with Demything.



KICK worksheet

KICK irritating thoughts

1. **Know When I'm Upset/Nervous**
 - a. Identify physical warning signs of becoming upset/nervous
 - b. Identify triggering events/situations
 - c. Identify triggering thoughts

2. **Irritating thought**
 - a. What's the irritating thought that is triggering your feelings?
 - b. Yell "STOP!" in your mind to stop the thought.

3. **Calming Thought**
 - a. Focus your attention on a calming, more true thought for as long as you can

4. **Keep Practicing**
 - a. Repeat this process as often as necessary until the calming thought replaces the irritating thought.
 - b. Don't give up! Even if you have to do this a hundred times a day or more. With practice, your thoughts *will* change.



The Social Support Network

- Core concept laid out in *The Special Needs Parenting Survival Guide*.
- If a member of the family is struggling with trauma...that's a special needs situation.
- Utilize connections with others to spread stress out and reduce isolation
- Utilize special skills of others to help address and eliminate/reduce stressful situations.



Social Support Worksheet

Build Your Social Support Network

Nobody gets through life alone. Dealing with stressful situations such as those faced by special needs parents can be isolating. Parents can find themselves trying to do it all themselves. This is a mistake. You need to build a network of people that can help you. A social support network. Think of yourself as the president...the social support network is your cabinet of advisors and assistants who help you get the job done.

- 1. On a separate sheet of paper, start a list. Start with yourself and your immediate family. Then add extended family, friends, neighbors. Then add professionals whom you already work with. Think broadly, who are people that are important to you and your family...who helps you even a little bit? A trusted plumber? Do you talk to the mailman often? Don't worry about who they are or what they do, just put them down as potential resources.**
- 2. Now, try to make a comprehensive list of all the things you do and/or need help with.**
- 3. Now, on this list, make a note of the different things these people do for you already. Also make notes of things you wouldn't ask certain people to do for you? (Is your sister chronically late all the time?...then don't count on her for time specific stuff.)**
- 4. Are there needs that aren't being met yet? Look at your list and identify people who, with some support or training, could help you meet these needs.**
- 5. Reach out to people on the list and let them know (if necessary) what you need from them. Thank them for their support.**
- 6. Periodically review your list and add or remove resources as necessary.**



Take Home Message

- ▶ Trauma impacts the entire family, not just one member.
- ▶ Trauma can impact anyone regardless of race, religion, gender, profession or socio-economic status
- ▶ Trauma can manifest in many different ways, often looking like other conditions (Anxiety, ADHD, medical issues, etc.)
- ▶ With proper treatment, trauma in the family can be successfully managed. Survivors can and do thrive!



For More Information...

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