Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma:
Does Prenatal Life Offer An Opportunity?

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How Do Traumatic Experiences Move ..... From Here To Here

Audio
**Could A Prenate Be Listening?**

To our experiences
our words
our thoughts
our feelings
our wounds?

Could this influence their development and sense of self?

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**TRAUMA CROSSES GENERATIONS**

- Parental experiences prior to child's birth
- In utero experiences
- Parent ⟷ Child Attachment
- Parent ⟷ Child Interactions

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“TRAUMATIZED PEOPLE BECOME STUCK, STOPPED IN THEIR GROWTH…”

“Being traumatized means continuing to organize your life as if the trauma were still going on—unchanged and immutable—as every new encounter or event is contaminated by the past.”

“The survivor’s energy now becomes focused on suppressing inner chaos, at the expense of spontaneous involvement in their life.”

Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps The Score*
WHAT HAS HISTORY TAUGHT US ABOUT TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES THROUGH FIELDS LIKE NEUROLOGY AND ENDOCRINOLOGY?

Our bodies do not forget.
At a cellular level.

TEACHINGS FROM HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS’ OFFSPRING

- Holocaust survivors’ children and grandchildren suffer
  - Low cortisol levels
  - PTSD symptoms
    - More likely to occur with maternal PTSD

TEACHINGS FROM ORAL TRADITIONS

- Historical Traumas “Soul Wounds”
  - American Indians
  - African Americans
  - Alaskan Natives
TEACHINGS FROM A NATURAL DISASTER

• 1998 Ice Storms in Quebec
  • Outcomes for children of mothers pregnant during storms
    • As toddlers...lower general intellectual functioning & language development
    • At 5½...obesity
    • At 13...greater insulin secretions

ACTIVITY

TEACHINGS FROM WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACKS

• World Trade Center Attacks
  • Cortisol levels
    • Low levels in women pregnant who were in the buildings and diagnosed with PTSD
    • Low levels in infants born to those women
DOES THIS KNOWLEDGE PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE THE TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA DURING PRENATAL LIFE?

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DEVELOPING CHILD
- Sounds and Movements
- Mother's experiences
- Father's presence and influence

HYPOTHALAMIC-PITUITARY-ADRENAL (HPA) AXIS
- HPA Axis can become dysregulated
- Atypical response to stressors
- Impacts:
  - metabolism
  - immunity
  - memory
  - learning
NEURAL INTEGRATION

- Daniel Siegel presents in *The Mindful Therapist*
- At about 6 months (24 weeks) in utero, the **medial prefrontal cortex** is developing
- Medial prefrontal cortex *integrates* ("links") all areas of the brain
- Meditation enhances the strength (makes physically "thicker") of the **medial prefrontal cortex**

Functions of the medial prefrontal cortex include:
- Bodily Regulation, Attuned Communication, Emotional Balance
- Flexibility (mental), Fear Extinction, Intuition
- Empathy (you), Insight (me), Morality (we)

INTERACTION OF GENETICS WITH EXPERIENCES

(From about six months in utero and throughout lifetime)

Expression or suppression of our genes
WHAT IF WE COULD INTERVENE DURING PRENATAL MONTHS?

- Offering hope of:
  - Parental healing
  - Differentiating between the parental and the developing child's experiences of the trauma
  - Processing the developing child’s experiences before birth
  - Possibilities of preparing the developing child for life after birth

WHAT COULD THAT MEAN?

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Siegel, D. (December 3, 2010). The mindful therapist: A new approach to understanding and working across neural integration from the inside out. Presentation through PESI, LLC.