ISSTD Professional Training Assessment and Treatment of Traumatized Children and Adolescents with Dissociative Symptoms and Disorders: Formerly Dissociative Disorders Psychotherapy Training Program (DDPTP)

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Intended Participants: Licensed mental health professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, mental health counselors) who are personally treating a child or adolescent with Complex PTSD, a significant trauma history, or dissociative symptoms; educators in human services

Session Dates: Six months period from January 14 to June 15, 2012 covering 9 sessions/topics. Each session will begin with approximately a week of reading followed by 10 days for online discussion.

Course Format: This course is designed in an online format to cover nine sessions of combined literature discussion and clinical case presentations/discussions by faculty and students.

Evaluation Form: At the conclusion of this course, an evaluation form will be provided. Please fill it out and send to us. Thanks. We count on you for your feedback.

24.5 Continuing Education Credits: For students who sign up for CEUs, they will be required to take a test at the completion of the course and successfully pass the test to receive the CEUs. In addition, they will be required to complete the evaluation form at the end of the class. They will be expected to present a case study during the course and participate in discussions that demonstrate that they have read the materials and followed the discussions through postings. Preparing for the case description can take about 2 hours for the write up and another one hour for the discussion of the case, responding to the students’ postings. Each session readings will require approximately 2 to 4 hours. About 2 hours will be required for reading the postings by students during each of the discussion sessions, and posting online to the faculty questions.

Certificate of Completion Form: In order for participants to receive the certificate of completion form, they will be required to participate in discussions that demonstrate that they have read the materials and followed the discussions through postings.

About the Curriculum: The course you are about to take represents the collaborative efforts of Dr. Joyanna Silberg, Frances Waters, LMSW, and Dr. Sandra Wieland with suggestions from the course directors from ISSTD, Dr. Richard Chefetz, Dr. Eli Somer, Dr. Elizabeth Howell, and Dr Steven Frankel.
Description: This course begins with a brief historical perspective of childhood dissociation, an explanation of the effect trauma can have on infant/child neurobiology, and an introduction to theories of dissociation. The course then covers methods of assessment, assessment tools, and differential diagnosis across the spectrum of dissociative pathology. Family dynamics that contribute to dissociative pathology in children and ways to work effectively with the family while building positive attachment between child and parents will be described. Ideas for helping to stabilize the child, promote emotional regulation, explain dissociation to both the child and the parents, and encourage communication between dissociative states will be given. Special attention will be given to working with the varied societal systems (schools, social services, legal system) with which the family is involved. A variety of treatment modalities and creative techniques will be presented for safely processing trauma and furthering integration of the child’s dissociative states. Extensive case studies and specific examples will be used throughout the course. Participants can present case studies from their own practices to enhance discussion.

Participants finishing this course will have a comprehensive understanding of how to intervene with the traumatized child with dissociative symptoms in ways to promote healthy development.

Required Book to be Purchased:


*See Recommended Books to be read at end of Syllabus

(Some revisions of the readings may be made before the session begins.)

Session 1: History, Theory and Neurobiology

This session presents a brief history of childhood dissociation together with the major theories that have been developed to help understand the dissociative process: vulnerability from disorganized attachment, complex developmental trauma, discrete behavioral states, and affect avoidance theory. The effects of trauma on the infant/child's developing neurobiological systems will be reviewed.

Session 1 Goals:

1. Participants will be able name three neurobiological impairments caused by trauma.
2. Participants will be able identify characteristics of disorganized attachment in children and why disorganized attachment creates a vulnerability for dissociation.
3. Child Clinicians will be able to compare two theories of dissociation and how they can use these theories to help explain dissociation to children and their parents.
Readings for Session 1:

Suggested reading:

Session 2: Assessment and Differential Diagnosis
This session describes the many forms of trauma that can cause dissociative symptoms in children. How children’s dissociative presentation differs from that of adults will be highlighted. The course will describe assessment techniques, interview questions, and standardized questionnaires. The importance of being aware of co-morbid conditions but yet distinguishing between dissociation and other disorders (e.g., ADHD, bipolar disorder, reactive attachment disorder) will be emphasized. The ISSTD’s Guidelines for Evaluation & Treatment of Dissociation in Children and Adolescents will be introduced.

Session 2 Goals:
1. Participants will describe dissociative symptoms in children covering the spectrum from dissociative processes to a disorder.
2. Participants will identify differential diagnoses commonly seen with traumatized and dissociative children, i.e. ADHD, Bipolar Disorder, Reactive Attachment Disorder, OCD.
3. Participants will describe the therapeutic goals of the ISSTD’s Guidelines for Evaluation & Treatment of Dissociation in Children and Adolescents.

Assessment Checklists:
- Putnam, F. Child Dissociative Checklist (CDC) & Explanation.
- Armstrong, J., et.al., Adolescent Dissociative Experience Checklist & Explanation.
- Stolbach, B. Children’s Dissociative Experiences & PTS Inventory Checklists (female, males, & scoring instructions). Checklist also available at www.routledge.com/9780415889940
Readings for Session 2:


Session 3: Understanding Family Dynamics

This session will describe dysfunctional family pathology and how this may influence the formation and/or persistence of dissociative symptoms. Participants will learn ways to help families shift these negative patterns, provide a sense of safety and structure for the child, and establish a more secure attachment pattern across the child’s dissociative states. Ways to engage the caregivers as partners in their children’s treatment will be presented.

Session 3 Goals:

1. Participants will describe techniques for helping caregivers provide soothing and structure for dissociative children.
2. Participants will list 3 therapeutic exercises to do with caregivers in therapy sessions with dissociative children that help defeat dissociative barriers.
3. Participants will identify caregiver’s behaviors that can serve as traumatic triggers, and how to help them interrupt these.

Readings for Session 3:


Session 4: Stabilization Part 1 of 2
This session will focus on increasing sense of safety, stabilization and ego strengthening techniques using imagery, art therapy, cue words, visual prompts, and EMDR. Emphasis will be placed on how to explain both to the child and the parents about dissociation, how to help the child and parent start to recognize the dissociative states and behaviors, and how to develop cooperation between dissociated states. Ways to manage and reduce traumatic triggers will be discussed.

Session 4 Goals:
1. Participants will explain stabilization techniques that enable the child to feel empowered, grounded, and safe.
2. Participants will describe psycho-educational methods for explaining dissociation and trauma with children.
3. Participants will describe strategies to build internal awareness across all dissociative states and break down amnesic barriers.

Readings for Session 4:

For those trained in EMDR the following article can be read:

Session 5: Stabilization Part 2 of 2
Using participants’ case presentations, this session will focus on techniques for special management of problems encountered in working with dissociative children and adolescents. These problems include self-injury, sexually acting out, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, rage reactions and somatic symptoms.
Session 5 Goals:
1. Participants will identify psychoeducational, and cognitive-behavioral techniques for working with self-injury.
2. Participants will analyze how obsessive compulsive problems in children can overlap with dissociation.
3. Participants will identify techniques to decrease dissociative based sexual acting out behavior.

Readings for Session 5:

Session 6: Working with Systems
In this session, the presenters will discuss some of the political issues raised in interacting with systems such as the court, social services, school systems and health care when discussing a child’s dissociative symptoms. Focusing on normative developmental trajectories, pragmatic interventions for stabilization, and following current guidelines and standards of practice will help the practitioner to negotiate some of the difficult issues that arise.

Session 6 Goals:
1. Participants will identify common barriers in mental health and school environments that present obstacles to assessment and treatment.
2. Participants will learn how to use common language to interface with professionals who may be skeptical of trauma-based pathology.
3. Participants will identify ways to balance ethical standards with legal requirements.

Readings for Session 6:
- ISSTD’s Trauma & Dissociation in Children DVD;s selected portions re: legal system.
Session 7: Trauma Processing Part 1
The next two sessions will illustrate working with children and adolescents for safe processing of traumatic events across all sensory domains. Strategies, such as imagery, drawings, play therapy, ego state therapy, and EDMR will be discussed to help children safely process traumatic memories. Emphasis will be placed on the resolution of shame associated with their traumatic experiences.

Sessions 7 & 8 Goals (Trauma Processing Part 1 & Part 2)
1. Participants will be able to apply and use art activities for containment of traumatic memories and mastery.
2. Participants will be able to apply the use of a variety of techniques to encourage internal communications between dissociative states for effective processing of traumatic memories.
3. Participants will be able to apply imagery techniques to help with processing memories.

Readings for Session 7:

For those trained in EMDR, the following article can be read:

For those trained in hypnosis, the following article can be read:

Session 8: Trauma Processing Part 2
Readings for Session 8:
Session 9: Integration and Post-Integration
This session will cover the final stages of work with traumatized and dissociative children. The presenters will discuss a variety of creative modalities and imagery techniques, and emphasize the treatment challenges at the final stages of treatment, including signs of a relapse, ongoing development of coping strategies, and resolution of attachment issues.

Session 9 Goals:
1. Participants will be able to identify specific techniques to achieve integration
2. Participants will be able to recognize the types of triggers with child and/or family that may cause relapses.
3. Participants will be able to assess the ongoing development challenges faced by the traumatized child after integration.

Readings for Session 9:
Recommended Books: