

Youth's multiple coping skills in response to traumatic experiences

A metaphor devised by Dr. Delphine Collin-Vézina

Definition of complex trauma

- A dual reality that includes **prolonged exposure to traumatic events** that are particularly invasive and a **multitude of negative impacts** related to exposure, as well as their **lasting effects on functioning**.

Key characteristics

1. Repetition and chronicity

Traumas are not one-time events, but occur repeatedly over time.

2. Relational nature

Trauma is often inflicted in the context of a significant relationship (parent, caregiver, loved one).

3. Betrayal of fundamental trust

The child is hurt by the very people who should be protecting them, which leads to confusion between love and violence, safety and threat.

4. Impairment of development

Trauma affects identity formation, emotional regulation, perception of oneself and the world, and interpersonal skills.

5. Pluridimensional repercussions

They are observed beyond post-traumatic stress disorder in several areas of functioning: social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical.

Neglect or prolonged psychological abuse, sexual or physical abuse, chronic exposure to violence or family dysfunction, repeated placements, or major family instability are examples of situations that can cause complex trauma.

**What
are
water
fleas or
daphnia?**

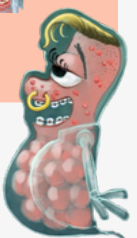


- Creatures **capable of adapting to survive**: they can grow larger to scare off predators, shrink to hide, or develop a shell or teeth to defend themselves.



- **In the absence of adversity, these protections disappear.**

Like daphnia, it is important that youth who have developed **protective mechanisms, in other words survival strategies for coping with adversity**, particularly trauma, have the opportunity to let go of these mechanisms and truly be themselves.



Youth's multiple coping skills in response to traumatic experiences

A metaphor devised by Dr. Delphine Collin-Vézina

7 coping strategies for surviving adversity

Strategy #1
Fight

Objective: Confront the danger in an attempt to control it.
Behaviors: Anger, opposition, control, aggression.
Risk: Maintaining a cycle of conflict where the danger persists.

Strategy #2
Flight

Objective: Escape danger at all costs.
Behaviors: Avoidance, agitation, anxiety, difficulty settling down.
Risk: Viewing oneself as fragile and powerless.

Strategy #3
Freeze

Objective: To disconnect from reality when escape or fight are impossible.
Behaviors: Absence, dissociation, apathy, emotional disconnection.
Risk: Difficult to reconnect with oneself after prolonged dissociation.

Strategy #4
Fawn/Friend

Objective: To appease danger through docility, in order to “buy peace.”
Behaviors: Excessive need to please, dependence, self-effacement.
Risk: Loss of boundaries, low self-esteem, toxic relationships.

Strategy #5
Flag

Objective: To resign oneself after the failure of other strategies.
Behaviors: Paralysis, silence, sensory blurring, despair.
Risk: Self-abandonment, loss of vital momentum.

Strategy #6
Fright

Objective: To freeze in the face of an extreme threat, without dissociation.
Behaviors: Internal panic, immobilization, intense fear.
Risk: Deep trauma, “psychological fracture.”

Strategy #7
Faint

Objective: To disconnect completely from the body—the ultimate strategy.
Behaviors: Loss of consciousness, extreme dissociation.
Risk: Indicates a state of extreme terror, often linked to severe trauma.

Intervening in a trauma-sensitive manner

- By understanding that youth who have experienced complex trauma use coping strategies to **survive**, it is possible to change **one's perspective and see beyond behaviors**.

With appropriate trauma-sensitive interventions, youth feel safe and the protective mechanisms they have developed are no longer necessary. Like daphnia, youth can shed these mechanisms and be who they truly are.

