

How Trauma Affects Family and Friends' Involvement in Forensic Services

Louise Maclellan

Family and Friends Representative

Quality Network for Forensic Mental Health Services

So what is trauma?

- ▶ Trauma happens when we suffer an overwhelming event which we cannot assimilate into our being in the typical way.
- ▶ It is a normal, healthy response to an intolerable situation.
- ▶ Trauma causes the inability to remain in the here and now.

Physical effects of trauma on the brain and body

- ▶ The brain picks up sensations of sound, sight, smell, touch and taste and sends its' perception of threat or danger through what is effectively our “survival instinct” to reach our conscious awareness.
- ▶ Impulses stimulate the stress-hormone system, and the autonomic nervous system then orchestrates a whole-body response.
- ▶ Stress hormones are released, increasing heart rate and breathing, preparing us to fight back or run away.
- ▶ If these stress hormones overwhelm us and the brain and body will then continue to perceive and respond as if the trauma is continuing in the present moment.

Possible causes of trauma

- ▶ Physical violence, particularly by a caregiver
- ▶ Sexual abuse
- ▶ Repeated verbal and emotional abuse
- ▶ War trauma
- ▶ Accidents
- ▶ Death of a parent or other close relative
- ▶ Neglect of basic needs for healthy development: love, empathy, safety, unconditional positive regard.
- ▶ Inter-generational trauma

Psychological effects of trauma

- ▶ Feeling overwhelmed
- ▶ Chronic distrust of other people
- ▶ Inhibition of curiosity
- ▶ Distrust of one's own senses
- ▶ Dissociation: a splitting of awareness
- ▶ Freezing
- ▶ Flashbacks
- ▶ Lack of impulse control
- ▶ Difficulty with emotional regulation

Key sources of stress for Forensic Carers are:

- ▶ Difficulty of travelling long distances to Units
- ▶ Restrictive security procedures
- ▶ Lack of flexibility for visits
- ▶ Lack of privacy during visits
- ▶ Not being consulted or informed about their relative.
- ▶ Isolation and stigma associated with having a relative in Forensic Mental Health Services and.
- ▶ Unpredictable nature of Carer's challenges

Carers' perspective on most important needs:

- ▶ Staff to perceive Carers as important to engage with, with needs of their own
- ▶ Face to face contact with Staff to talk, be listened to, and to ask questions
- ▶ To be respected and valued
- ▶ To get the information they need
- ▶ A comfortable, private place for visits
- ▶ More flexibility for visits

The importance of self-care

- ▶ Self-care is the most valuable tool we have in supporting the well-being of another.
- ▶ A resilient, regulated nervous system is a vital example to others as we relate “nervous system to nervous system.”
- ▶ Support in working on personal issues of staff enables them to be **present** for those in their care.

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the frame, creating a modern, layered effect.

Thank you for listening

Louise Maclellan