

# A DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA PERSPECTIVE ON TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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## Why is a Developmental Trauma Perspective Needed?

1. Trauma-informed care includes assessing trauma history and trauma-related reactions in **all behavioral and emotional problems of childhood and adolescence**
2. Trauma-informed care for children and youth requires attention to the **Disturbances of Self-Organization** included in Complex PTSD as well as PTSD symptoms
3. Trauma-informed care for children and youth requires attention to other forms of trauma-related reactions included in **Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD)**
4. Together, Complex PTSD and DTD provide a comprehensive framework for TIC, enabling children and youth recover from developmentally adverse trauma

# American Psychological Association Professional Practice Guidelines

## Key Considerations for Traumatic Stress Disorders

### Assessment of Psychological Trauma

1. Past and current exposure to potentially traumatic stressors
2. *Current and prior history of traumatic stress symptoms that may impact ... health, well-being, and functioning.*
3. Ebb and flow of traumatic stress symptoms across time, *developmental periods*, and life circumstances
4. *Interaction of traumatic stress symptoms with other psychological, medical and/or life problems*

# What Is Complex Trauma?

## The 10 “I’s”

*Intentional interpersonal* acts that are *Inescapable* and cause *Injury* that is potentially *Irreparable*, highly *Intimate*, *Intrusive*, and *Invasive* of the body and the self of the individual, often involving *Imminent threat*, the totality of which results in deformations of *Identity* (including the capacity to *integrate one’s identity and experience and maintain one’s integrity*) and disrupting *Interpersonal capacity for intimate and other relationships*.

(Ford & Courtois, 2020)

# Psychosocial and Behavioral Challenges for Traumatized Youth ↓

- Dissociation
- Anxiety/Panic
- Reactive Aggression
- School Problems/Failure
- Impulsivity/Hyperactivity
- Oppositionality-Defiance
- Withdrawal/Isolation
- Addictions
- Non-suicidal Self-harm
- Recklessness/Risk Taking
- Unresolved Grief
- Suicidality
- Depression
- Severe Mental Illness
- Obsessions/Compulsions
- Sexual Problems
- Eating Problems
- Sleep Problems
- Self-blame/hatred/shame
- Hopelessness

Trauma Informed Care Is Essential  
for **all** Children/Youth Who Have  
Mental/Behavioral Problems

Not Only for Those Recognized as  
Trauma Victims and Diagnosed  
with PTSD

# Complex PTSD 1.0: Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS)

- ✓ **1. Alterations in regulation of affect and impulses**
  - ✓ a. Affect regulation
  - ✓ b. Modulation of anger
  - ✓ c. Self-destructiveness
  - ✓ d. Suicidal preoccupation
  - ✓ e. Difficulty modulating sexual involvement
  - ✓ f. Excessive risk taking
- ✓ **2. Alterations in attention or consciousness**
  - ✓ a. Amnesia
  - ✓ b. Transient dissociative episodes and depersonalization



# Complex PTSD 1.0 -- DESNOS

## Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified

- ✓ **3. Alterations in self-perception**
  - ✓ a. Ineffectiveness
  - ✓ b. Permanent damage
  - ✓ c. Guilt and responsibility
  - ✓ d. Shame
  - ✓ e. Nobody can understand
  - ✓ f. Minimizing
- ✓ **4. Alterations in perception of the perpetrator**
  - ✓ a. Adopting distorted beliefs
  - ✓ b. Idealization of the perpetrator
  - ✓ c. Preoccupation with hurting the perpetrator



# Complex PTSD 1.0 -- DESNOS

## Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified

### ➤ 5. Alterations in relations with others

- a. Inability to trust
- b. Revictimization
- c. Victimizing others

### ➤ 6. Somatization

- a. Digestive system
- b. Chronic pain
- c. Cardiopulmonary symptoms
- d. Conversion symptoms
- e. Sexual symptoms

### ➤ 7. Alterations in systems of meaning

- a. Despair and hopelessness
- b. Loss of previously sustaining beliefs

# ICD-11 Complex PTSD 2.0

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## PTSD

### ➤ **Re-experiencing**

- Nightmares
- Flashbacks

### ➤ **Avoidance** of Trauma Reminders

- Internal (thoughts, feelings)
- External (places people circumstances, activities)

### ➤ **Hyperarousal**

- Hypervigilance
- Startle reaction

# ICD-11 Complex PTSD 2.0

## **DSO (Disturbances in Self-Organization)**

### ➤ **Affect Dysregulation**

- Difficulty calming when distressed
- Emotional numbing

### ➤ **Alterations in Relationships**

- Feel emotionally distant
- Difficulty staying emotional close to people

### ➤ **Negative Self-Concept**

- Feel worthless
- Feel a failure

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion A.

Traumatic victimization

(physical, sexual) +

Attachment disruption (primary  
caregiver loss, separation,  
neglect, or emotional abuse)

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion B.

### Affective/Physiological Dysregulation

- B. 1.*** Inability to modulate or tolerate extreme affect states (e.g., fear, anger, shame, grief), including extreme tantrums, immobilization)
- B. 2.*** Inability to modulate/recover from extreme bodily states: aversion to (a) touch, (b) sound; (c) unexplained bodily problems

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion B.

### Affective/Physiological Dysregulation

***B. 3.*** Diminished awareness/dissociation of emotional or bodily feelings

***B. 4.*** Impaired capacity to describe emotions (alexithymia) or bodily states

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion C.

### Attentional/Behavioral Dysregulation

**C. 1. Attention-bias toward or away from potential threats**

**C. 2. Impaired capacity for self-protection, including extreme risk-taking or thrill-seeking**



# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion C.

### Attentional/Behavioral Dysregulation

**C. 3. Maladaptive self-soothing**

**C. 4. Habitual (intentional or automatic) or reactive self-harm**

**C. 5 Inability to initiate or sustain goal-directed behavior**

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion D.

### Self and Relational Dysregulation

- D. 1.*** Persistent extreme negative self-perception—self-loathing or viewing self as damaged/defective
- D. 2.*** Attachment insecurity: attempt to care for caregivers, or difficulty tolerating reunion after separation from primary caregiver(s)

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion D.

### Self and Relational Dysregulation

***D. 3.*** Extreme persistent distrust, defiance or lack of reciprocal behavior in close relationships

***D. 4.*** Reactive physical/verbal aggression

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Criterion D.

### Self and Relational Dysregulation

- D. 5.*** Psychological boundary deficits (excessive seeking of intimate contact or reliance on peers/adults for safety/reassurance)
- D. 6.*** Dysregulated empathic arousal (intolerant/indifferent or overly reactive to others' distress)

# Developmental Trauma Disorder Field Trial Interview Study Phase I

$N = 236$  ages 7-18 years old; 50% female

- 30% Black, 17% Latinx, 3% Asian American
- Trauma Histories: 9% No trauma, 11% one type trauma, 38% poly-victim, 62% traumatic loss, 45% family violence, 24.5% neglect, 21% sexual abuse, 21% emotional abuse, 17% community violence

Ford et al. (2018) *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 79(5), E1-E9.

# DTD vs. PTSD Comorbidity in the DTD Interview Field Trial

## Shared

- Affective, Psychotic, Anxiety Disorders

## Unique to DTD

- Panic Disorder, Disruptive Behavior Disorders

## Unique to PTSD

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

# Developmental Trauma Disorder

## Field Trial Replication Study

***N* = 271** ages 8-18 (*Mdn*=11.5) 47% female

- 50% White, 29% Black, 17% Latinx, 1% Asian American, 10% Other
- Trauma History: 4.5% No trauma, 4.5% one type trauma, 17% poly-victimized, 80% separation/loss, 32.5% family violence, 19% neglect, 21% sexual, 20% emotional abuse, 18% community violence



# DTD vs. PTSD Comorbidity in the DTD Interview Field Trial Replication

Shared

Bipolar, Psychotic, Panic, Phobic, Attention  
Deficit, Conduct, Separation Anxiety  
Disorders

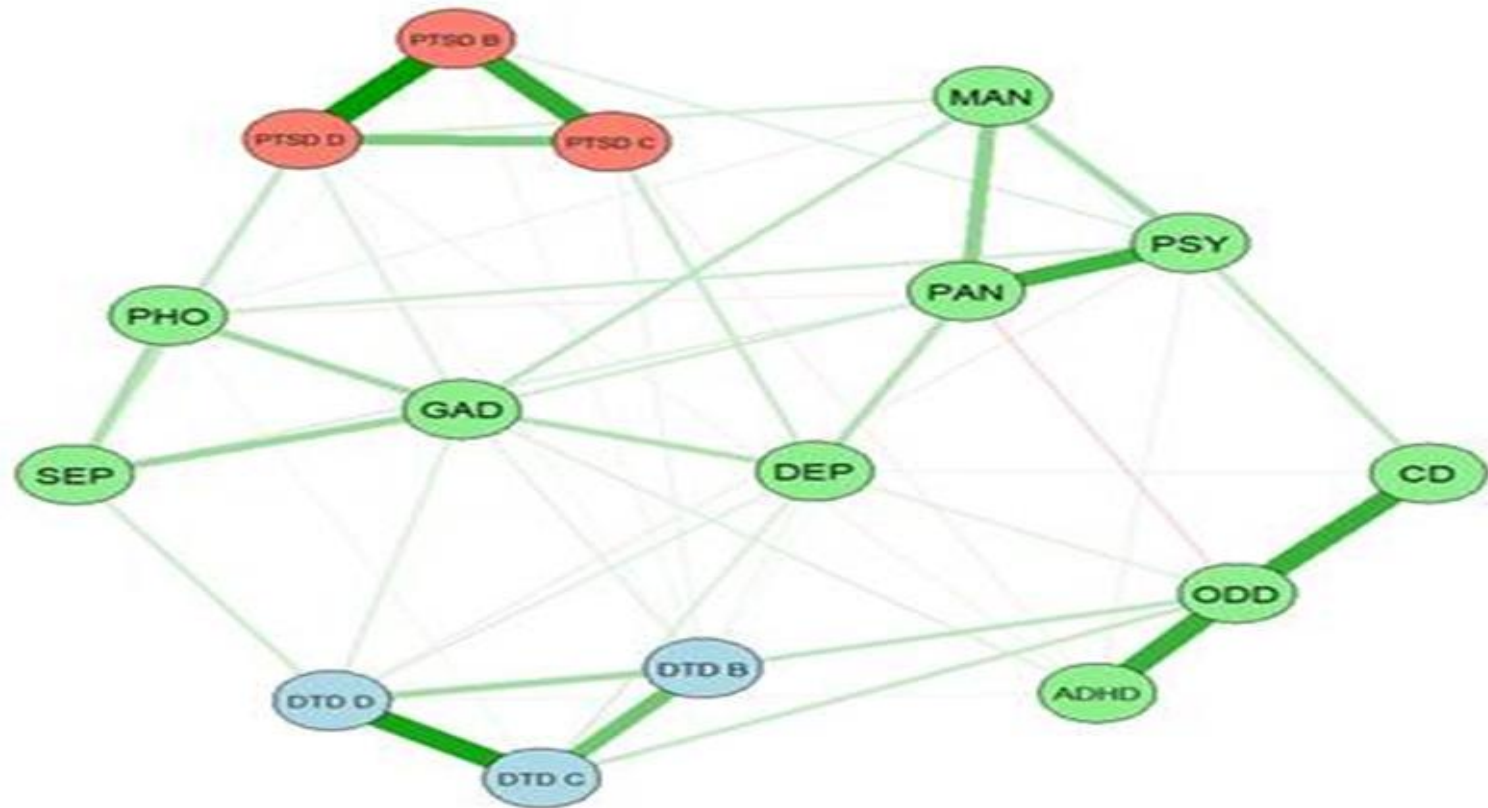
Unique to DTD

ODD, OCD, Major Depression

Unique to PTSD

[None]

# Network Analysis of DTD, PTSD, and Psychiatric Disorder Symptoms



Knefel, M., Karatzias, T., Spinazzola, J., Shevlin, M., & Ford, J. D. (2023). The relationship of posttraumatic stress disorder and developmental trauma disorder with childhood psychopathology: A network analysis. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 99, 102766. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2023.102766>

# TIC Resources for Youth/Families

## **Digital Diaries: Trauma Avengers** **A Web-Based Toolkit by and for Youth**

**<https://traumaavengers.com/>**

Improvisational cellphone diary entries by youth  
actors in role as trauma survivors in therapy

Plus Commentary by their therapists

**NOTE: The films involve moments of intense  
distress as well as inspiration and empowerment**

# Resources for TIC Providers

*A Look Inside TIC Sessions at Critical Moments*

## **Identifying Critical Moments & Healing Complex Trauma**

50+ films provide clinicians, counselors, and other TIC providers a window into how TIC helps youth and families navigate crises. Each webinar features a scene where the youth and caregiver(s) are actors playing fictional characters, but the therapists and the developmental trauma dilemmas portrayed are real.

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network Learning Center**

<https://learn.nctsn.org/course/index.php?categoryid=78>

**Center for the Treatment of Developmental Trauma Disorders**

<https://developmental-trauma.org/about-us/what-we-do/>