**BREAKING THE TRAUMA CYCLE**

**IN THE MISSIONARY FAMILY**

1. **WHAT IS TRAUMA?**

* In the "purest" sense, trauma involves *exposure to a life-threatening experience.*
* *Betrayal trauma*, when individuals are violated and abused by those on whom they must depend or trust, can also cause PTSD-like symptoms.
* Traumatic experiences *shake the foundations of our beliefs about safety, and shatter our assumptions of trust.*
* The individual who is traumatized and in crisis, is *not able to cope and recover with his/her customary coping strategies.*
* Biblical terms related to trauma: Greek uses several words for *suffering* in English, such as *affliction, trial, testing, temptation, persecution, rebuke, insult, grief, reproach, etc.*
* 1 Peter 4:12; James 1:2-7

1. **WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CAUSES OF TRAUMA FOR MISSIONARY FAMILIES?**

* **Natural Disasters** – earthquake, volcano typhoon, flood, tornado, fire, famine, drought, landslide, epidemic. etc.
* **Human-induced Act of Hostility** – murder, hostage, theft, armed robbery, physical assault, sexual assault/rape, war, revolution, coup, terrorism, torture, imprisonment, bombs, dangerous living situation, evacuation, any violence involving a member, etc.
* **Ethnical Shock** – child abuse, extra-marital affairs, sexual immorality, abortion, homosexuality, suicide/suicide attempt, divorce/separation, embezzlement, intense conflict, HIV/AIDS or exposure to these, sexual harassment, pornography, etc.
* **Bizarre Behavior** – psychotic break, anorexia, bulimia, desertion, multiple personality (D.I.D.), effects of past satanic cult involvement, etc.
* **Tragedy** – accidental death, plane crash, auto rash, severe accidental injury, sudden illness resulting in a rapid death, etc.
* **Other** – government opposition, false accusations, betrayal of friends, saying multiple goodbyes, significant family events in the home country (death, marriage, illness), cancellation of a long-term project, serous team conflicts, and changes in roles.

1. **HOW MIGHT TRAUMA AFFECT THE MISSIONARY FAMILY?**

* Karl Slaikeu (*Crisis Intervention: A Handbook for Practice and Research) coined a helpful acronym (BASIC) re: a whole system’s response to a trauma and MMCT added an S.*
* **Behavior –** adult behavior is either avoidance related or related to a state of heightened physiological arousal, child behavior is often regressive, act out or withdraw
* **Affect –** influenced by culture, gender, personality and history, adults most often experience fear, anger, and guilt, children feel same emotions but show them differently
* **Somatic**
* **Interpersonal**
* **Cognitive**
* **Spiritual**
* **TRAUMA CYCLES**

1. **HOW CAN WE AS MISSION ORGANIZATIONS AND MISSION SUPPORTERS HELP MISSIONARY FAMILIES BREAK FREE OF THEIR TRAUMA CYCLES?**

* **Give them the opportunity to talk** about what they’ve been through and how it has affected them
* Encourage them to cope with the trauma vs. avoiding it (avoidance is an important risk factor in developing PTSD
* Caregivers’ beliefs about suffering, pain and healing will affect the care
* Caregivers need to **be able to sit with pain, tolerate contradictions and unanswerable questions** without speakingthe obvious,and **hear rage against God without taking offense** (Job 13:1-8)
* **Learn helpful attitudes such as**: (*From Mourning into Dancing,* Wangerin)

1. Don’t expect to fix it, but rather to companion the broken
2. Do not expect thanks or obedience or rational behavior
3. Know the grief process and the griever
4. Make peace with your own death and with death itself
5. Your presence is more important than any solutions you might propose
6. Allow them to repeat themselves and tell the same story again – there is healing in expression

* **Provide practical and logistical help** with finances, medical care, housing, meals, childcare, future employment options, work continuity, paperwork, etc.
* **Provide Psychological First Aid**

1. Establish a human **connection** in a **nonintrusive, compassionate manner**
2. Enhance immediate and ongoing **safety,** and provide physical and emotional **comfort**
3. **Calm and orient** emotionally overwhelmed or distraught survivors
4. Help survivors to tell you specifically what **their immediate needs and concerns are**
5. Offer practical assistance and information
6. Connect survivors ASAP to **social support networks**
7. **Support adaptive coping**
8. Provide information
9. Be clear about your availability and link them to a local recovery system

* **Crisis Assessment** – Use BASICS
* **Crisis Incident Stress Debriefing by Jeffrey Mitchell**

1. Used successfully with emergency personnel, and adapted for missionaries.
2. Essential components are: 1) *a trained de-briefer meets with traumatized individual or group within 24-72 hours following a trauma;* 2) the debriefers facilitate a *discussion of the traumatic event in which they cover the fats, the mental and emotional reactions to the incident, and the symptoms experienced both during and after the event;* 3) the debriefers educate the victims on normal responses to crises in order to *normalize their response and to given them increased understanding about what they are currently experiencing and what they might experience in the future*.
3. For prevention of re-traumatizing, assess the victims’ level of fatigue, practical support needs, sense of being overwhelmed and anxiety levels to determine the right timing.
4. Help to instill a sense of safety security and calm before they leave the session
5. They may need more than one session
6. Facilitate spiritual, practical and emotional care following the session

* **Acknowledge and Reframe**

1. Listen without judgment
2. Acknowledge the feeling as understandable given the circumstances
3. Offer a slightly altered, more balanced or rational point of view
4. *This affirms the feeling of the individual but changes its frame of reference and meaning*

* **Education about Triggers and Grounding**

1. *Triggers are experiences associated with some aspect of the trauma, and can activate a post-trauma response* (intrusive memories or anxiety reactions)
2. Triggers can be *visual, sound, smell, taste, physical or body, significant dates or seasons, stressful events or arousal, strong emotions, thoughts, behaviors*, etc.
3. *Grounding is a technique for helping persons get reoriented to the present reality by coaching them to calm themselves down by intentionally focusing on their immediate surroundings* (what they can see, hear, and feel) and having them describe those things in a methodical, detailed fashion.

* **Help the missionary break free of the trauma cycle by encouraging them to:**
  + Recognize the trauma and trauma cycle in their lives
  + Identify the losses and grieve well (finish the grieving process
  + Identify and reprocess their negative beliefs
  + Memorialize the loss
  + Forgive themselves, the aggressor, God other
  + Reconcile when appropriate and possible

**Resources:**

* *Doing Member Care Well*, Kelly O’Donnell, Ed.
* *Enhancing Missionary Vitality,* John R. Powell and Joyce M. Bowers, Ed.
* *Trauma Resilience,* Frauke C Schaefer, MD and Charles A. Schaefer, PhD., Ed.
* *Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience,* Eastern Mennonite University 5-day course

For debriefing on trauma:

http://www.mmct.org/#/resources/debriefings-english