

Strategies for Complex PTSD: Introducing Trauma-Informed Approaches

The Three Phase Model

For people diagnosed with complex PTSD, adopting a trauma-informed approach in therapy is paramount. Interventions that neglect this perspective can be less effective for this population. Reflecting on previous treatment outcomes forms a crucial part of that approach. Judith Herman's phase-oriented trauma treatment model, rooted in Pierre Janet's early work, significantly influences contemporary trauma therapy. This model delineates three distinct phases of intervention.

1 Phase One: Stabilization and Safety

- Addressing trauma begins with a phase of stabilization, aiming to:
 - Alleviate autonomic dysregulation, tendencies toward self-harm, and addictive behaviors.
 - Ensure a safe environment, recognizing that recovery stalls if a client is, or perceives themselves to be, in danger.
 - Facilitate emotional and autonomic stability, equipping clients to manage emotions and daily stress effectively.

2 Phase Two: Addressing Traumatic Memories

The second phase concentrates on traumatic memories. The collective understanding of how to approach such memories has evolved, shifting from detailed recollection to focusing on making sense of the past and integrating implicit memories.

3 Phase Three: Integration and Meaning-Making

Integration and meaning-making constitute the final phase. It involves seeking self-understanding after trauma: assisting clients to find meaning in their life choices, including adopting nonviolent parenting practices, engaging in social causes, or pursuing careers in justice or healing.

Exploring Trauma Treatments

There are various treatments for trauma, ranging from psychodynamic therapies and supportive psychotherapies to EMDR, IFS, and somatic approaches. It's imperative to assess the evidence for each treatment and consider the client's specific needs and likelihood of completing therapy.

Selecting Appropriate Treatment

It is necessary to examine each client's prior history to determine the most suitable approach. This includes therapeutic approaches tried in the past by the client, as well as personal preferences or specific individual factors.

Key Points

- Complex PTSD requires a trauma-informed approach, while reflecting on what has been effective or ineffective about any past treatments.
- The three phase model – comprising stabilization, addressing traumatic memories, and integration – provides a structured approach to trauma therapy.
- Evaluating the evidence base of various treatments and considering the client’s specific needs is crucial in selecting the most appropriate intervention.