



Seeking Safety teaches coping skills

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Evansville Courier and Press
March 12, 2012

To better serve the needs of those seeking appropriate mental health treatment, options such as trauma informed care can be provided for individuals. Underlying many symptoms of anxiety, depression, substance abuse and other mental health issues one may find a history of trauma.

Trauma can be present in many forms and what is traumatic for one person may not affect another. Examples of traumatic events may be military experiences, natural disasters, domestic violence, unexpected or violent deaths, sexual abuse, physical and emotional abuse, to name a few.

One form of trauma that we hear more about these days is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Although some patients may meet the full criteria for PTSD, many may simply struggle with some of the symptoms of PTSD.

In screening for traumatic events in individuals' lives some may not even recognize that an event was traumatic and continues to affect them. According to a clinical guide used by mental health professionals, the symptoms of PTSD are intrusion (the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced, such as in flashbacks and nightmares); avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing (efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, people and places that remind one of the trauma), and arousal (sleep difficulties, irritability, hyper vigilance and startle response).

An individual's ability to cope with trauma appropriately depends upon such things as observing coping skills of others during their formative years,

the severity of the trauma, number of and duration of traumatic events, quality of support systems, spirituality and meaning attached to the trauma, mental health issues, substance abuse and medical problems.

Seeking Safety, an evidence-based curriculum developed by Lisa Najavits, attempts to keep individuals grounded in the present and improve their ability to cope with trauma issues. It is particularly targeted for individuals struggling with both trauma and substance abuse issues.

Many patients began abusing substances in an effort to manage or numb emotions resulting from trauma. The abuse of substances may have served that purpose for many years but eventually led to more serious problems in their lives, such as financial difficulties, legal problems, relationship issues, medical problems or increased mental or emotional struggles.

In efforts to better identify those individuals affected by traumatic events, Southwestern's substance abuse services have implemented a trauma screening tool at the point of assessment. The Seeking Safety curriculum also is being incorporated into residential treatment groups and outpatient treatment groups.

The goal of the Seeking Safety curriculum is to teach individuals appropriate coping skills to manage the aftermath of their traumatic experiences. This can be accomplished by helping people become more aware of trauma, providing better screening for trauma-affected individuals,

teaching appropriate coping skills and assisting individuals in ways that will greatly improve the quality of their lives.

For more information on substance abuse treatment or the Seeking Safety program, please contact Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare at 812-473-3144.