

Engaging Highly Anxious/Resistant Kids in Starting the TN

Ideas drawn from WA State clinicians, the STEPS team, and other TF-CBT resources

Children

- Gradual exposure is key
 - By touching on trauma topics in each component of PRAC you help them get used to talking about it and demonstrate YOU can handle it and won't freak out or judge them.
- Metaphors
 - Give a strong rationale for having them share. For kids this can be mostly metaphor/analogy: "Trauma is like a...."
 - Examples: Splinter, scrape, band-aid, beach ball in pool, disorganized cabinet/freezer (keeps popping open, need to take things out and organize), sponge (filled up, needs to be squeezed out), caterpillar into a butterfly, book with crumpled page (won't close right, need to iron out flat), shattered mirror (keep getting cut on the pieces, need to clean up, make it whole), weeds in the garden (need to get to the root or it will keep growing)...create your own!
- Books/Videos/Stories
 - "Please Tell"
 - "Brave Bart"
 - "A Terrible Thing Happened"
 - Read one together and invite them to make their own book
 - Video clips from movies, YouTube
- Confident, calm, positive stance
 - Message: This is helpful, many other kids have told their stories and felt better
 - May seem hard at first but you will be able to do it piece by piece/step by step
 - Remind them that memories themselves aren't dangerous/can't hurt us, though they can FEEL that way
- Normalize desire to avoid
 - Most kids don't want to talk about it, some want to run right out of the room, but that doesn't happen. We always find a way to share that works, and afterward kids feel much better.
- Link TN to getting better
 - Telling will help with symptoms that bother them (sleep problems, scary memories, etc.)
- Offer choices
 - Give 2-3 options of ways to start approaching trauma material (make sure you don't aim too low, or the TN could take forever!)
 - For the most avoidant/anxious, try to identify a "small bite" they can take, where they will experience success sharing some trauma-related material. Often just a little sharing can get the ball rolling.
- Praise any sharing they are able to do
- Timelines
 - Start by making a timeline of their lives—includes also good past events, and perhaps even desired future events, putting trauma in larger context and highlighting that it is only a (hopefully small) segment of their long life.
 - Can start with benign/easy events to get them rolling, then have them include where known traumas occurred on the timeline.
 - Get crafty—beads on a necklace to represent important events!
 - Draw "River of life," including stops/events along the way
- Change it up! Sometimes it helps to change between writing and drawing.



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- Puzzles
 - Blank jigsaw puzzles can be printed from online. Work your way from the edge pieces to the middle, putting harder material on each piece
 - Write a “piece” of the narrative on puzzle pieces and put the puzzle together
- Ways to tell without speaking
 - Some kids prefer to write, type, draw or text the information
 - Use games like hangman to get at words, phrases or information the child is unable to say aloud
 - Let child circle trauma-related words or abuse types (e.g., circle from a list of sexual abuse types)
 - Be a secretary! Can help to pace the exposure (slows it down) and you can repeat it back to them as you go to double the exposure.
- Reduce pressure of the situation
 - Give them something to do with their hands
 - Sit next to them at a table or allow them to draw or look at something else while telling (vs. having to look you in the eyes)
 - Let them start by telling a video camera that you then play back together/transcribe
- Motivators
 - Set goals for the TN, to be followed by play/fun/reward time. Remind them of the fun activity to help pull them through the difficult stalling points.
 - “Five and Five” - Alternate between 5 minutes of sharing/working on story and 5 minutes fun games/reward time
 - Jar of erasers, stickers, special stones/beads that kids can pick as a reward
- Explore WHY they don’t want to share/what they fear could happen if they tell
 - “What do you think would happen if you told your story?”
 - If child is reluctant to say, you can speculate: “Some kids don’t want to tell because they think x...is that a concern for you?”
 - Retaliation? Parent upset? CPS involvement/family separation? Some loss of control over the situation? Someone in particular will find out? The memory just feels scary or embarrassing?
 - Validate and problem-solve realistic fears
- Photographs
 - Let them take pictures of stuff they have trouble talking about (e.g.. car, house, etc.)
 - Incorporate pictures of them making emotion faces or acting out parts of the story into a word document
 - Pictures of sand tray, telling parts of the story, can add captions in a word document
- Cool art supplies (keep some just for TN work so they are motivating)
 - Glitter pens, play doh, fancy markers
- My very own TF-CBT workbook
 - The prompts/worksheets can help the child move easily to the next step in the process
- Provide a roadmap
 - Use the “Nine steps of TF-CBT” sheet or a list of components so they know that sharing their story is one of the steps they will take before finishing treatment.
- Testimonials
 - At the end of treatment, invite kids to write a note to other kids who have been through something difficult about what helped, about how it got easier to share their story.
 - Share these testimonials with new/anxious kids (most powerful if you can pair them with messages from kids of similar age and abuse type).
- Special repository



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- Decorate a box, then put feelings, thoughts about the trauma in the box
- Invite them to put notes/reminders about hard memories into a special folder in a locked drawer, for you to review or for them to take out and discuss at a later date.
- Incorporate a game of some kind
 - Sharing with turn-taking
 - Question cards that pull for information about/experience of what happened
 - For every letter guessed right in Hangman, 2 sentences of TN
 - Color-coded Jenga set, colors linked to questions
- Comic book/strip
 - Draw their own or use a free site like makebeliefscomix.com, marvelkids.com, strip generator, toon doo, etc.
 - Can link to child's interest in a superhero
- Drawing
 - Ask child to draw one memory that is scary from the trauma screener and then have them explain it
- App on the tablet/phone
 - TalkingTom (tell their story to the cat, who will repeat it back)
 - Paint, draw the scenario
- Start with a Table of Contents/Chapter List for their story; let them pick which chapter to start on (making sure they do share *some* trauma-related content)
- Prepare/incorporate a list of coping strategies they can use
- Check in on SUDS/Fear Thermometer – can use coping skills if gets too high
- Family trees used to illustrate family at the time of event or different families they have lived in
- Bring a comfort item (stuffed animal, token) to give strength during the telling
- Write a letter to other kids who are going through the same trauma
- Let them do a chapter on how they wish the event had turned out (but make sure they arrive at understanding that their ACTUAL behavior made perfect sense and was reasonable at the time of the event)
- Explore what their religion or culture has to say about dealing with hard memories
- Use puppets
 - Make popsicle stick characters for all involved, then act it out/write a script
- Use a sand tray
 - Can take pictures of different “scenes” or illustration of life before/after the event
- Get a “Baseline Narrative” right before doing the Trauma Narrative:
 - Ask kids to give a detailed account of a neutral or positive event before asking about the trauma
 - Include feelings, thoughts, and even bodily sensations
 - This has been found to help kids describe their traumas (Sternberg et al., 1997; Deblinger, Behl & Glickman, 2006)
 - Gives you an idea when narratives are poor due to avoidance/anxiety vs. just storytelling ability/developmental age



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Adolescents

Same core ideas as above, plus:

- Games/apps on tablet
- Music
 - Pandora
 - Teen chooses a song that relates to the trauma and then discuss the connection
 - Pick a song before, during and after trauma
- YouTube videos
 - “It’s Not About The Nail”
- Rewards
 - Play basketball after session
 - Balloon tennis
 - Walk outside
- Reporter conducting an interview
 - They are famous person/athlete/celebrity (follow their interests), and have just published their memoir.
 - “In chapter 4 you talk about the times when you were sexually abused by your uncle. Tell us, when did you first know that something wasn’t right?...On page 111 you describe one of the times he touched you. Tell our listeners what happened that day...What are some things you would tell kids who have recently gone through this?...From your experience, why does child abuse happen?...Is there anything you learned from this experience that you think might help you in the future?” etc.
- Talking about their experience overcoming past struggles/fears (e.g., “What was something that you were scared of initially, but you were able to overcome your fear?”)
- Identifying famous people with a similar trauma background
 - For example, <http://www.1in6.org> for boys/men with history of sexual abuse
- Testimonials
 - Teens may really resonate reading a message from a kid their age who has been through the TF process (can start gathering these testimonials—without names, of course—at your agency)
 - Look for news stories, books or other examples (see great local story below)
 - http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2019892286_needy13yes.html
- Encourage ownership
 - The more the TN can reflect the teen’s interests and creativity, the better engaged and more motivated they will be
- Art
 - Drawing pictures of reality now vs. desired future
 - Collage - Incorporate images from magazine or internet to help tell their story
- Writing (if this is an interest!)
 - Poetry (for teens who need more structure, try: <http://www.pongoteenwriting.org/index.php>)
 - Journaling – for kids who journal or want to...can suggest questions or topics to write about, to assess and modify their narrative. Examples: reflect on how you are different since this happened; changes that are not so good and any that are positive; the people who have helped you along the way; what you would tell other kids who have been through this; what you would tell your best friend if this happened to them; etc.
- What if it was your best friend? How would they tell their story?
- Draw a picture to scale of what she looked like at age of abuse and a picture of offender to scale and talk about “What could that little person do to that big person?”



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Parents/Caregivers

- Predict their child might not want to come to the TN/next session, but stress the importance of making sure they do! (If avoiding works one week, the child will likely become even more avoidant the following week.)
- Make sure parent/caregiver is on board—they should understand and buy into the rationale for TN



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