

Psychological Triage  
EDS 246b  
Preventive Psychological Interventions  
Stephen E. Brock, Ph.D., NCSP

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Meeting Agenda

- Definition of, and Rationale for, Psychological Triage
- Psychological Trauma Risk Factors and Warning Signs
  1. Crisis Exposure
  2. Personal Vulnerabilities
  3. Threat Perceptions
  4. Crisis Reactions
- Conducting Psychological Triage

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Evaluating Psychological Trauma

1. Rationale 
2. Risk factors 
3. Warning signs 

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

**Rationale for Assessing Psychological Trauma**

1. Unique consequences of crisis exposure
  - Has different effects
  - Recovery is the norm
    - Exceptions
      - Preexisting mental illness
      - Trauma history (e.g., adverse childhood experiences)

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

**Rationale for Assessing Psychological Trauma**  
(cont.)

2. Unique consequences of crisis intervention
  - Can cause harm

Primum non nocere  
 Ψ  
 First, do no harm



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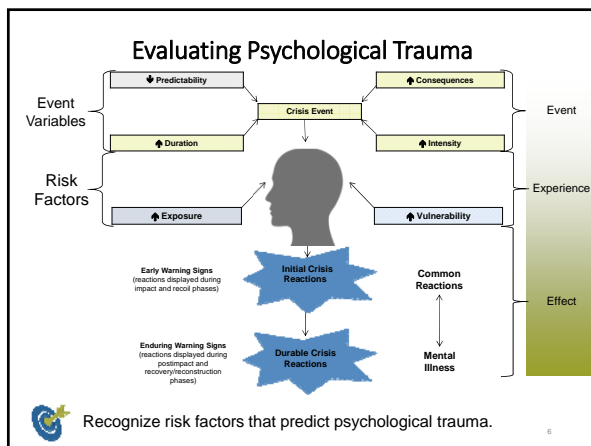
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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Psychological Trauma Risk Factors: Predictors of Traumatic Stress

- Risk Factor 1
  - Crisis exposure: Physical proximity to the crisis
    - More direct crisis exposure = ↑ trauma risk
    - Greater distance from crisis = ↓ trauma risk

Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma.

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Psychological Trauma Risk Factors: Predictors of Traumatic Stress (cont.)

- Risk Factor 1: Physical proximity to the crisis
  - Percentage with severe PTSD 1 month after playground shooting
    - By location at the time of shooting

Location	Percentage with severe PTSD
On Playground	49%
At School	17%
Absent	7%
Off-track	5%

Pynoos et al. (1987)

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Psychological Trauma Risk Factors: Predictors of Traumatic Stress (cont.)

- Risk Factor 2
  - Crisis exposure: Emotional proximity to the crisis
    - How close are individuals to each other?

Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma.

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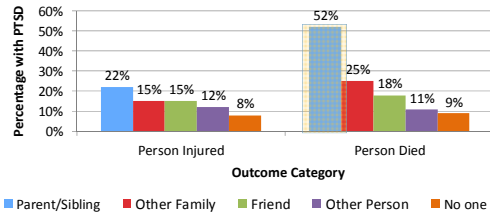
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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Risk Factors:  
 Predictors of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Risk Factor 2: Emotional proximity



Outcome Category	Parent/Sibling	Other Family	Friend	Other Person	No one
Person Injured	22%	15%	15%	12%	8%
Person Died	52%	25%	18%	11%	9%

Applied Research and Consulting et al. (2002, p. 34)

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Risk Factors:  
 Predictors of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Risk Factor 3: Pretrauma internal vulnerability
  1. Preexisting physical and psychological illness
  2. Trauma history (e.g., ACEs)
  3. Avoidance coping
  4. Social withdrawal
  5. Lower developmental level
  6. Poor self-efficacy
  7. High psychophysiological arousal
  8. Pessimism

 Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma.

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Risk Factors:  
 Predictors of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Risk Factor 4: Pretrauma external vulnerability
  1. Lack of family support and resources
    - a. Absence of family resources
    - b. Poor family functioning
    - c. Parental traumatic stress
    - d. Family history of PTSD
    - e. Parental mental illness
    - f. Poverty

 Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma.

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Risk Factors:  
Predictors of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Risk Factor 4: Pretrauma external vulnerability (cont.)
  2. Lack of extrafamilial social resources
    - a. Social isolation
    - b. Low social support
    - c. Lack of perceived social support
    - d. Bias and discrimination

 Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma. 13

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Risk Factors:  
Predictors of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Risk Factor 5: Threat perceptions
  - Subjective impressions more important than exposure
  
- Adult reactions influence threat perceptions



 Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma. 14

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Warning Signs:  
Indicators of Traumatic Stress**

- Early warning signs
- Enduring warning signs
- Developmental variations
- Cultural variations



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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Warning Signs:  
Indicators of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Early warning signs
  - Mostly expected responses to stress
  - Generally not signs of mental illness
  - Important for survival in threatening situations



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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Warning Signs:  
Indicators of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Early warning signs (cont.)
  - Require immediate intervention
    1. Interference with functioning
    2. Dangerous coping behaviors
    3. Acute panic, fear, distress
    4. Dissociative states



Identify the warning signs that indicate psychological trauma. 17

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Warning Signs:  
Indicators of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Early warning signs (cont.)
  - Indicate more severe trauma
    - Persistent hyperarousal
    - When combined with particular risk factors
      1. Physical injury
      2. Death of immediate family member
      3. Preexisting mental illness
      4. Complex trauma (e.g., ACEs)



Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma. 18

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Warning Signs:  
Indicators of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Enduring warning signs
  - Reactions that do not remit or they worsen = more severe psychological trauma
    1. Acute stress disorder (duration = 3 days to 1 month)
    2. Posttraumatic stress disorder (duration = 4 weeks or more)

 Recognize risk factors that predict psychological trauma. 19

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Warning Signs:  
Indicators of Traumatic Stress** (cont.)

- Cultural & religious variations
  - *Every culture provides its members with recognizable languages of distress with which to communicate their suffering. If we are able to understand this language, which may be verbal or non-verbal, physical or psychological, our humanitarian interventions may be better informed.*

Tearfund (2006, pp. 32-33)



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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Psychological Trauma Warning Signs:  
Indicators of Traumatic Stress** (cont.) 

- Cultural & religious variations (cont.)
  - Influence types of events judged threatening
  - Affect how individuals and communities . . .
    - Assign meaning to crises.
    - Express traumatic stress.
    - View and judge crisis reactions.

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

	Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk
<b>Physical Proximity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Out of vicinity of crisis site	<input type="checkbox"/> Present on crisis site	<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis victim or eye witness
<b>Emotional Proximity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not know victim(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend of victim(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Acquaintance of victim(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Relative of victim(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Best friend of victim(s)
<b>Internal Vulnerabilities</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Active coping style <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally healthy <input type="checkbox"/> Good self-regulation of emotion <input type="checkbox"/> High developmental level <input type="checkbox"/> No trauma history	<input type="checkbox"/> No clear coping style <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty about previous mental health <input type="checkbox"/> Some difficulties with self-regulation of emotion <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance of immaturity at times <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma history	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance coping style <input type="checkbox"/> Preexisting mental stress <input type="checkbox"/> Poor self-regulation of emotion <input type="checkbox"/> Low developmental level <input type="checkbox"/> Significant trauma history
<b>External Vulnerabilities</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with intact nuclear family members <input type="checkbox"/> Good parent-child relationship <input type="checkbox"/> Good family functioning <input type="checkbox"/> No parental traumatic stress <input type="checkbox"/> Good social resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with some nuclear family members <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-child relationship at times stressed <input type="checkbox"/> Family functioning at times challenged <input type="checkbox"/> Some parental traumatic stress <input type="checkbox"/> Social resources/relations at times challenged	<input type="checkbox"/> Not living with any nuclear family members <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-child relationship at times stressed <input type="checkbox"/> Poor parent-child relationship <input type="checkbox"/> Poor family functioning <input type="checkbox"/> Significant parental traumatic stress <input type="checkbox"/> Poor or absent social resources
<b>Immediate Reactions During the Crisis</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Remained calm during the crisis event	<input type="checkbox"/> Displayed mild to moderate distress during the crisis event	<input type="checkbox"/> Displayed acute distress (e.g., fight, panic, dissociation) during the crisis event
<b>Current or Ongoing Reactions and Coping</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Only a few common crisis reactions displayed <input type="checkbox"/> Coping is adaptive (i.e., it allows daily functioning at previous levels)	<input type="checkbox"/> Many common crisis reactions displayed <input type="checkbox"/> Coping is tentative (e.g., the individual is unsure about how to cope with the crisis)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental health referral indicators displayed (e.g., acute dissociation, hyperarousal, depression, psychosis) <input type="checkbox"/> Coping is absent or maladaptive (e.g., suicidal or homicidal ideation, substance abuse)
<b>Total:</b>			

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage

**triage**  
[tree-ahzh]  
noun

1. the process of sorting victims, as of a battle or disaster, to determine medical priority in order to increase the number of survivors.  
*synonyms:* emphasize, prioritize, sort, classify, group

www.Dictionary.com; www.Thesaurus.com

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage: Levels of Triage

Level	Timing	Variables	Goals
<b>Primary</b>	Before providing interventions	Selected risk factors (exposure/vulnerabilities) + early warning signs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Estimate number of crisis interveners needed</li> <li>2. Establish initial treatment priorities</li> <li>3. Make initial individual intervention decisions</li> </ol>
<b>Secondary</b>	During delivery of interventions	Risk factors + early & enduring warning signs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Refine treatment priorities</li> <li>2. Refine individual intervention decisions</li> <li>3. Begin to consider psychotherapeutic care needs</li> </ol>
<b>Referral</b>	As school interventions conclude	Risk factors + enduring warning signs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify ongoing psychotherapeutic care needs</li> </ol>

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Conducting Psychological Triage: Preparation**

- Identify school & community mental health resources.
- Identify community-based support resources.
- Develop or obtain traumatic stress screeners.
- Develop or obtain referral forms.
- Understand and learn about culture-specific crisis reactions.

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Conducting Psychological Triage:  
A Process, Not an Event**

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graph LR; A[Primary Triage  
Establishes initial  
treatment  
priorities] --> B[Secondary Triage  
Uses data collected  
during  
interventions]; B --> C[Referral Triage  
Is conducted as  
interventions  
conclude];
```

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Conducting Psychological Triage:  
Primary Triage**

- Begins ASAP
- Completed before initiating interventions

```
graph LR; A[Primary Triage  
Establishes initial  
treatment  
priorities] --> B[Secondary Triage  
Uses data collected  
during  
interventions]; B --> C[Referral Triage  
Is conducted as  
interventions  
conclude];
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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage: Primary Triage (cont.)

- Use checklists to identify trauma risk 
- Make initial crisis intervention treatment decisions
- Collect facts (Planning Section) 
- Gauge trauma risk 
  - Exposure (physical & emotional proximity)
  - Known pretrauma personal vulnerabilities

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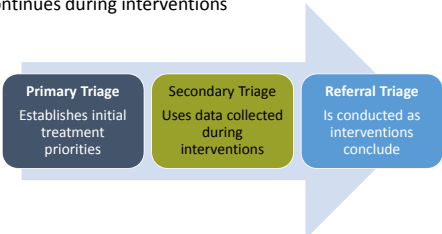
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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage: Secondary Triage

- Begins as interventions are initiated
- Continues during interventions



**Primary Triage**  
Establishes initial treatment priorities

**Secondary Triage**  
Uses data collected during interventions

**Referral Triage**  
Is conducted as interventions conclude

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage: Secondary Triage (cont.)

- Identifies warning signs (indicators) of traumatic stress
- Secondary triage resources:
  - Referral forms 
  - Screening tools 
  - Interviews 



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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage: Referral Triage

- Conducted as interventions conclude
- Identifies mental illness

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage: Referral Triage (cont.)

- Identifies ongoing treatment needs
  - Severe or dangerous reactions
  - Enduring reactions
  - Mental illness (e.g., PTSD)
  - Requires a tracking system

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage: Referral Triage (cont.)

- Identifies on-going treatment needs (cont.)
  - *Survivors of traumatic events who do not manifest symptoms after approximately two months generally do not require follow-up.*  
National Institute of Mental Health (2002, p. 9)

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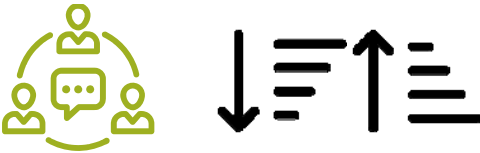
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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

1. Activity: Primary Triage Practice
2. Concluding Comment



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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage Activity: Primary Triage Practice

- Break into small groups.
- Refer to Handout, "Primary Evaluation of Psychological Trauma," and discuss your assigned crisis situation.
- Answer questions regarding . . .
  - Level of mental health crisis intervention
  - Primary assessment of trauma risk
- Record your thoughts and share your discussion.

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

#### Conducting Psychological Triage Activity: Primary Triage (Crisis Situation 1)

- A local gang, in response to the physical beating of a fellow gang member by a student at your high school, came onto your campus. A fight broke out in the student parking lot between the gang and the student's friends. A 15-year-old gang member is hospitalized with a stab wound, and one of your students died from a gunshot wound. Your principal tried to intervene; she is hospitalized with serious stab wounds and is not expected to live.

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Conducting Psychological Triage:**  
**Activity: Primary Triage** (Crisis Situation 2)

- A popular fifth-grade teacher at your elementary school was supervising his students on a field trip to a local lake. He tragically drowned after hitting his head on a rock while trying to rescue a student who had fallen into the lake.

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Conducting Psychological Triage:**  
**Activity: Primary Triage** (Crisis Situation 3)

- An irate father comes to your elementary school at 8:30 am, a half hour after school has started. He heads to his daughter's kindergarten classroom without checking in with the office. The father enters the classroom and begins to hit his daughter. As the astounded class and teacher watch, he severely beats her. Leaving the girl unconscious, he storms out the door and drives off in his car. The event takes place in less than 5 minutes.

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**Evaluating Psychological Trauma**

**Conducting Psychological Triage:**  
**Activity: Primary Triage** (Crisis Situation 4)

- One of your third-grade teachers is presenting a lesson and has just soundly reprimanded students for continuing to talk out; in fact, she is still very upset. Suddenly she turns pale, clutches her chest, and falls to the ground in front of 29 horrified children. Two frightened children run to the office, sobbing the news. The teacher is taken by ambulance to the hospital, where it is discovered that she suffered a massive heart attack. She never regains consciousness and dies the next morning.

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### Evaluating Psychological Trauma

**Conducting Psychological Triage:  
Concluding Comment and Discussion**

- *With the effects of teacher expectations in mind, we should note that teacher assistance, while often a valuable source of scaffolding on difficult tasks, may be counterproductive if students don't really need it. When students struggle temporarily with a task, the unsolicited help of their teacher may communicate the message that they have low ability and little control regarding their own successes and failures. In contrast, allowing students to struggle on their own for a reasonable period of time conveys the belief that students do have the ability to succeed on their own.*

Ormrod (1999, p. 451)

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### Next Meetings

Wednesday April 3	Crisis intervention 3: Specific interventions	Read: Brock et al. (2014); Brock et al. (2016), Chapters 15 & 16 Turn In: Psychological Triage Worksheets
Wednesday April 10	Crisis intervention 4: Psychological interventions	Read: Brock et al. (2016), Chapters 17, 18, & 19 Obtain: Brymer et al. (2012); Schreiber et al. (2006) Turn in: Psychological First Aid Script Activity: Psychological First Aid Role Plays/Observations
Wednesday April 17	No class	Read: Jaycox et al. (2018) Alternative learning activity: Complete CBITS Provider Basic Training Course, Part 1 (2.5 hrs): <a href="https://cbitsprogram.org/course">https://cbitsprogram.org/course</a> . Provide certificate for attendance credit. Take Part 2 for extra credit (unless you are not attending the NASP convention, in which case it can be taken for attendance credit). Provide certificate for extra credit. The workbook for this course is available as a free download after you register for this course.
Wednesday April 24	Suicide Demographics, Suicide Prevention, Suicide Intervention	Read: Miller et al. (2009); Brock & Reeves (2018); Lieberman et al. (2014) Obtain: Brock (2018a, 2018b)

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### Exam Questions

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