



Trauma, Resilience and Recovery

Creating a Safe and Supportive Learning Environment to Improve Educational Outcomes for Students Exposed to Traumatic or Stressful Events

Overview



- ✓ What is Trauma?
- ✓ Prevalence of Trauma
- ✓ Students & Trauma DVD
- ✓ Impact of Trauma on Learning, Behavior and Relationships
- ✓ What is Resilience?
- ✓ Psychological First Aid
- ✓ What Schools Can Do



One night several years ago, I saw men shooting at each other, people running to hide. I was scared and I thought I was going to die. After this happened, I started to have nightmares. I felt scared all the time. I couldn't concentrate in class like before. I had thoughts that something bad could happen to me. I started to get in a lot of fights at school and with my brothers.

Martin, 6th grader

What is Trauma?



An experience that **threatens** life or physical integrity and that **overwhelms** an individual's capacity to cope.

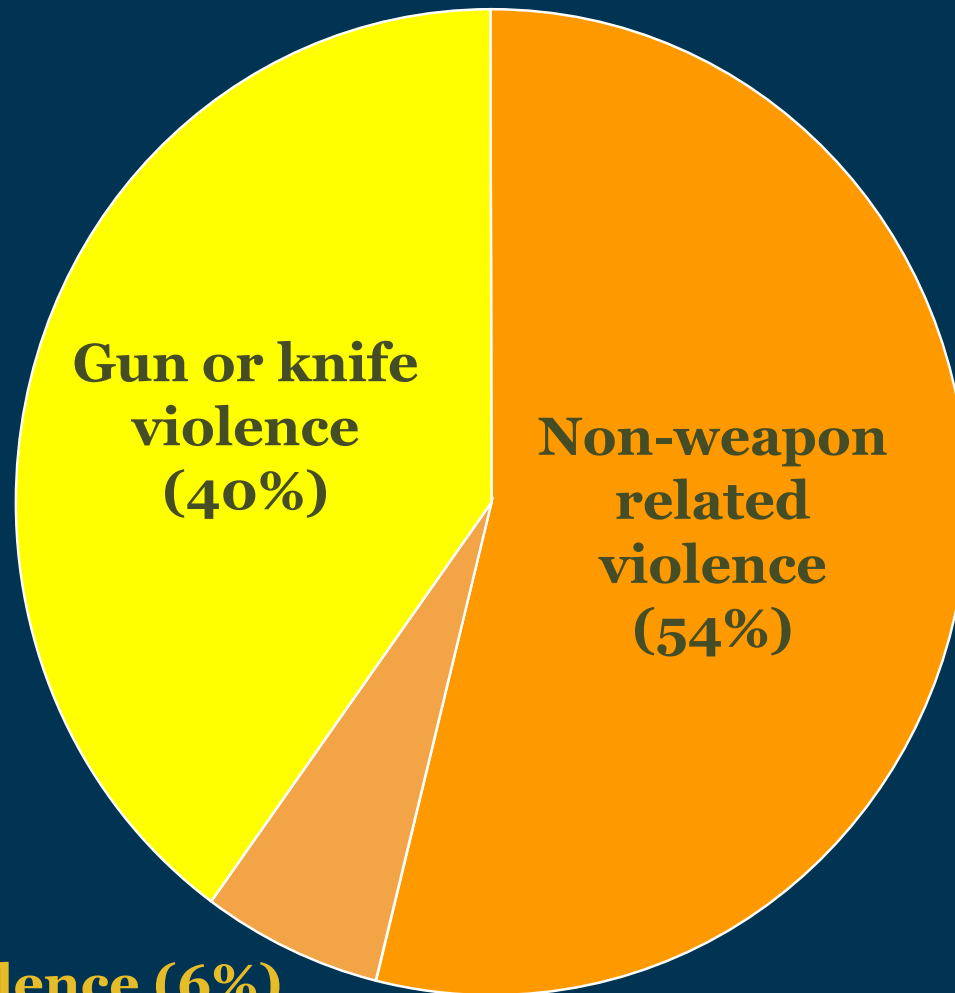
Generally, traumatic events evoke feelings of **extreme fear** and **helplessness**.

Situations That May Be Traumatic



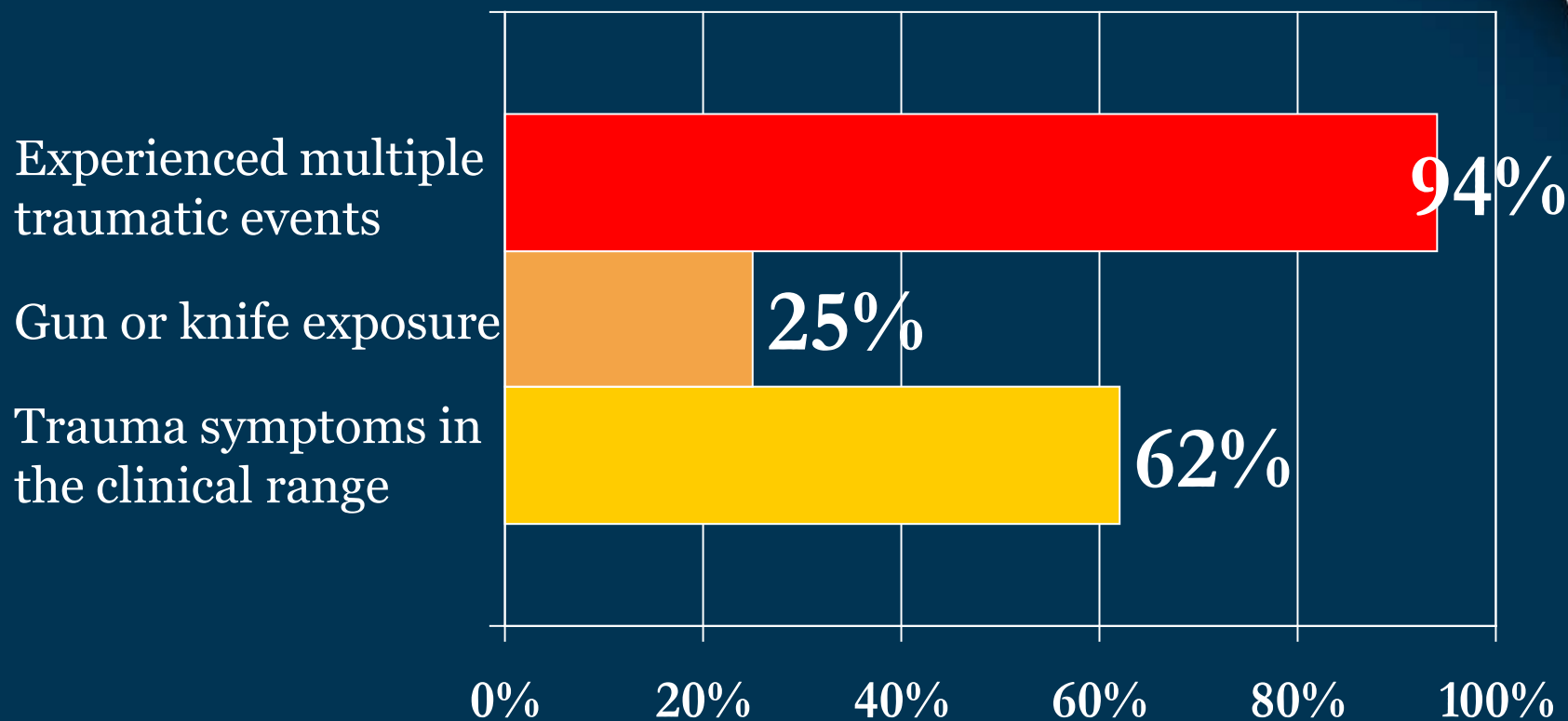
- Child abuse and maltreatment
- School-Related Violence
- Gang Violence and Threat
- Criminal victimization
- Medical trauma
- Traumatic loss
- Accidents and fires
- Domestic violence
- Bullying
- Community violence
- Natural Disasters

Prevalence of Violence in the Past Year Among LAUSD 6th Grade Students, 2004 (N=28,882)



No Violence (6%)

Screening at Belmont High School (N=145)

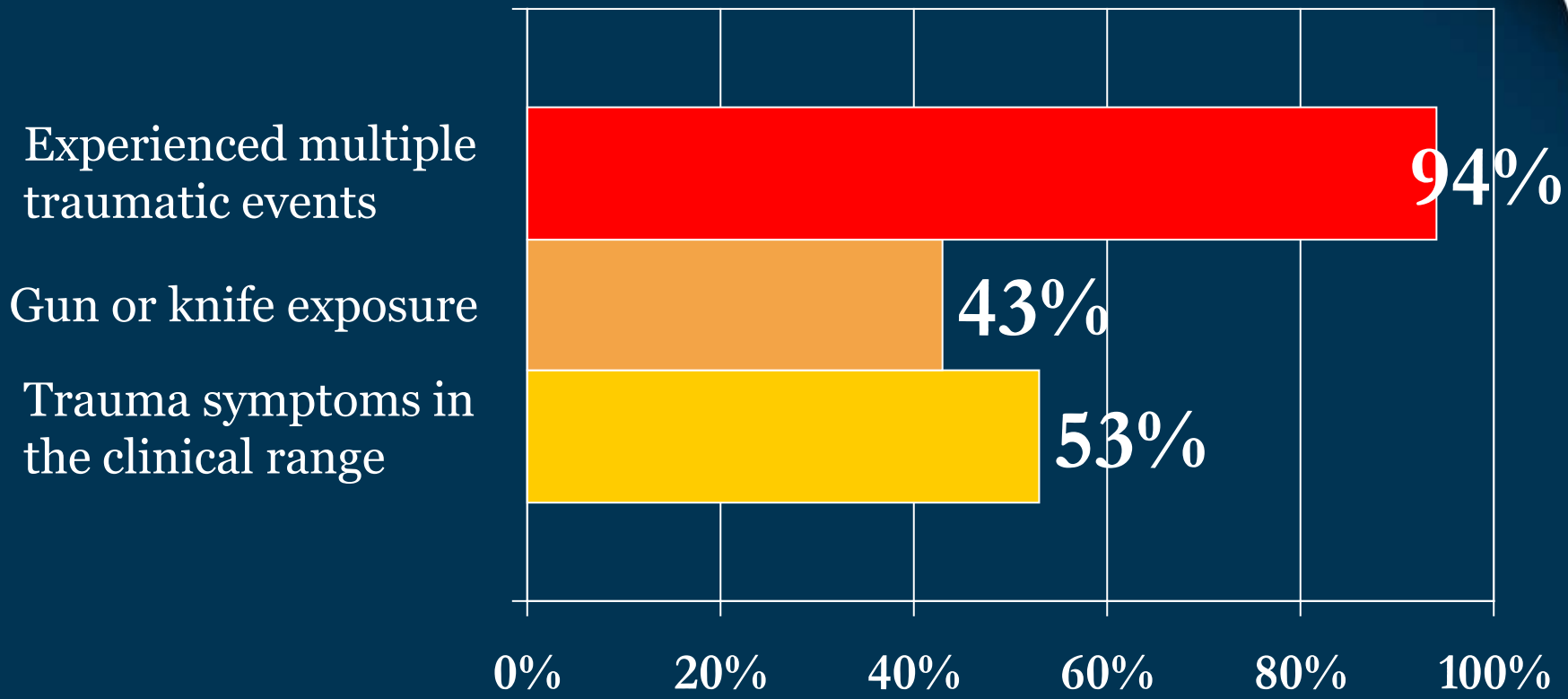




Students and Trauma DVD



Fall, 2008: Screening at Harmony Elementary School (N=49)



How does distress from violence affect students in the classroom?



- Academic, social and behavioral problems:
 - Failing to understand directions
 - Overreacting to comments from teachers and peers
 - Misreading context
 - Failing to connect cause and effect
 - Other forms of miscommunication



Behavior, relationships and the brain



The danger...is that children can unintentionally recreate the patterns they are used to. If staff members behave aggressively or are disengaged, they unintentionally “dig even stronger patterns in children’s brains about how the world works...and treats them”

Which students are at greatest risk for violence exposure, PTSD and Depression?: Disparity



- **Ethnic minorities** (90% in LAUSD)
- **Lower socio-economic status** (73% in LAUSD on free or reduced lunch program)
- **Older children**
- **Early conduct problems**
- **Living in urban areas**
- **Males** - LAUSD Study of 28,500 6th Graders

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP?



The negative effects of trauma exposure may explain one aspect of the bleak reality that African American and Latino students continue to trail far behind their Caucasian peers in schools, such as higher drop out rates from high school after generations of education “reform”. (Shin, 2005)

If left untreated....”Trauma Leaves Children Behind.”
Marleen Wong, 2007

What is Resilience?



- “Resilience” is the ability to bounce back from, or to successfully adapt to, adverse conditions such as personal or community problem or loss.
- Resiliency combines the interaction of risk factors & protective factors

Protective Factors that Promote Resiliency



■ External Factors

- Caring and supportive relationships
- High expectations for success
- Opportunities for meaningful participation

■ Internal factors

- Social Competence
- Problem-Solving Skills
- Autonomy
- Sense of purpose and future

What can be done for students exposed to violence?



- Listen
- Protect
- Connect
- Model
- Teach



Listen: You want to convey your interest and empathy



- *Where were you when this crisis happened?*
- *What was your first thought?*
- *What do you remember about that day?*





Protect

- *What's the most difficult thing to deal with right now?*
- *Are you worried about how you are reacting?*
- *Are you worried about your safety...*
 - *Around other students?*
 - *Around adults at school or anywhere else?*

Connect



- *What would make things easier to cope with?*
- *What can I do to help you right now?*
- *What can the school do to help?*
- *What can your friends do to help?*
- *What can your family do to help?*

Model Calm and Optimistic Behavior



- Maintain level emotions and reactions with students – stay in the middle – no highs or lows – to help them achieve balance
- Express positive thoughts for the future

Teach About Normal Stress Symptoms & How to Cope



Acknowledge the normal changes that can occur in people who are traumatized or grieve:

- Physical Changes
- Emotional Changes
- Cognitive Changes
- Changes in Spiritual Beliefs



Help students to problem solve:

- How to go to school everyday
- How to stay in school everyday
- How to do well in school, with friends and family

Resilience and Recovery from Trauma



- Most students recover over time, yet 25-30% withdraw from teachers, friends, & family members or “act out” with increased behavior, leading to expulsion, suspension or dropout.
- The reality is that a significant number of students cannot re-engage in the learning process or return to normal functioning without adult help and support.

The Trauma Lens



A trauma-sensitive environment changes the fundamental question for staff from...

“What’s wrong with you?”

to

“What happened to you?”



If we don't look for or acknowledge trauma in the lives of children and adolescents, we end up chasing behaviors and limiting the possibilities for change.

(Suarez, Flores & Zamarelli, 2007)

The Power of School Relationships



- **School is a place where it is possible for traumatized children to forge strong relationships with caring adults and learn in a supportive, predictable and safe environment.**
- **Mastering both academic and social skills are key to the healing process, the aim is to increase teaching and learning time and reduce time spent on discipline.**
- **Schools can partner with parents and guardians – who may themselves be struggling with symptoms of trauma – and give teachers the support they need to teach children how to regulate or calm their emotions and behavior.**

The Power of School Relationships



- The areas of the brain active in fearful states are different from those active in calm states, and it is **predominantly the areas active in calm states that are required for academic learning.**
- Just as traumatic experiences can undermine the brain's development, **good experiences can enhance it.**
- Schools are children's communities. There is a good fit between child and school when the community responds in helpful ways including a **welcoming environment where the staff understands trauma's impact on relationships, behavior and learning.**

Extra Understanding and Patience AND High Expectations...



- Educators and school staff are encouraged to maintain their expectations for behavior and performance and need not be afraid of using positive or progressive discipline.
- At the same time, be prepared to provide extra support, encouragement, and crisis counseling, if needed, to help the student return to school, stay in school, and succeed academically.

What can be done for students exposed to violence?



- Be aware of the signs
- See student's behavior through a "trauma lens"
- Give students consistency and choices
- Understand that children process experience through play or through their interactions with others, and this is a way to cope with trauma

Promoting Resiliency: Core Beliefs



I am OK

Most people can be trusted.

The world is mostly safe



Together, we can ensure that all students will be able to achieve at their highest levels despite whatever traumatic circumstances they may have endured.

