



Strand² Squared

A Paradigm Shift Solution

**If Only We Could:
if we master working with people who live with complex trauma- we will change the world**

“If you want to know what it’s like to survive hell and still come out shining brighter than the sun, look into the eyes of a woman (or any person) who has survived intense damage and remained soft”.-anonymous

People who live with complex trauma are often living with a life-times worth of trauma or perhaps they have had prolonged experience with darkness. Maybe they experienced child abuse, domestic violence, rape, trafficking, more rape, more domestic violence and still surviving. Perhaps they survived war or even torture. Complex trauma can be developed through repetitive, prolonged and/or cumulative experiences and is often interpersonal. Sometimes complex trauma develops during developmentally vulnerable moments in a person’s life- childhood or adolescence but can also develop when conditions are ripe with vulnerability, disability, disempowerment, dependency, age or other extenuating life circumstances.

Living with complex trauma directly and negatively impacts a person’s ability to connect or have meaningful healing relationships. Some of the people we serve and some of the people we work with are living with complex trauma. We often misunderstand.

We are well trained both explicitly and implicitly to be effective with “single incident” or “one off” traumatic events. We investigate reported crimes through the lens of a “single occurrence” and we often disregard or ignore cumulative history thus failing to understand complicated and confusing reactions. We are very successful working with victims, witnesses and family members who have low ACE scores, have healthy social networks and are ripe with assets and protective factors. We are less successful with those who need us most- those with high ACE scores, without social networks, lack assets and only carry risk factors.

Some typical behaviors from trauma may be overly sensitive to the moods of others, always watching to figure out what people around them are feeling and how they will behave. Some withhold their own emotions from others, never letting them see when they are afraid, sad, or angry. Many people who have experienced complex trauma often have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions, and may have limited language for feeling states. They often internalize and/or externalize stress reactions and as a result may experience significant depression, anxiety, or anger. Their emotional responses may be unpredictable or explosive. Often their reactions are powerful and heightened or they may dissociate and “tune-out”.

We understand the signs and symptoms of “trauma”, but often misunderstand that the signs and symptoms of complex trauma are often the same- but exaggerated, more intense and far more complicated. This presentation will highlight the specific challenges on working with people who are living with complex trauma thus expressing complex reactions. The presenter will discuss tangible strategies to improve service delivery and provide tools to evolve services with this difficult population while emphasizing that professional wellness is an ethical responsibility.

Objectives:

- To understand how trauma is related to victimization
- To understand what and how complex trauma may develop
- To provide tools and strategies to help people who live with complex trauma
- To provide tools and strategies for systems improvement
- To articulate professional wellness as an ethical responsibility