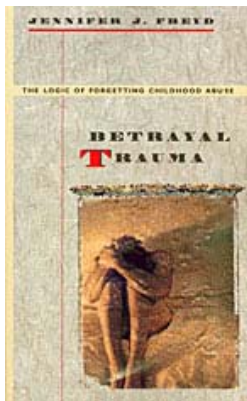


Attachment Trauma and Betrayal Trauma

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Clinically, the people who have the most problems are those who have experienced traumatic attachments. Attachment trauma is defined as “a fear-provoking threat to the self that is accompanied by a perceived threat to the availability of the attachment figure” (p. 389) [1]. Attachment trauma occurs whenever there are disruptions in which an attachment figure is perceived as unavailable as the result of a substantial unplanned separation which may happen when a parent is mentally ill, physically ill, a substance abuser, or imprisoned.



When the attachment figure is the source of the trauma, “betrayal trauma theory” asserts that children are more likely to dissociate important memories of the abuse because of the great conflict between the need for closeness, safety and trust and the awareness that the people they are attached to are indeed, not safe [2].

Attachment trauma is more likely to occur in situations of child physical or sexual abuse, emotional or physical neglect, domestic violence, and abandonment. Attachment injuries can occur when an individual feels abandoned by an attachment figure at a time of crisis, as when a car accident injuring mother and child creates a prolonged separation and attachment trauma occurs when a child loses an attachment figure through death.

Excerpt from Bloom, S. L. and Farragher, B. (2010). *Destroying Sanctuary: The Crisis in Human Service Delivery*.

References

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2. Freyd, J.J., *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse*. 1996, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.