



Could It Be PTSD?

by Dr. Yvonne Lewis

What do you think about when you hear Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? Displaced veterans? Men and women who suffer flashbacks from war? Although that's all true, one seldom hears about the PTSD that plagues inner-city residents. Yet, it's real—and more prevalent than you think! In fact, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says that 30 percent of inner-city kids suffer from PTSD.



Dr. Yvonne Lewis is a naturopathic doctor, author, lecturer, and singer, as well as the general manager of 3ABN's Dare to Dream Network for urban audiences.

Dr. Howard Spivak, the Director of the CDC's Violence Prevention Division, has presented research showing that inner-city children are essentially living in combat zones. However, unlike soldiers, they never

leave the combat zone, and experience repeated, inescapable trauma.

Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Ph.D., suggests that one in three urban youth have mild to severe PTSD, and their symptoms include fear of strangers, sleep problems, nightmares, repetition of the trauma in play, irritability, aggression, recklessness, and regression to bedwetting and thumb sucking. A sexually abused child may also play out "dark" bedroom scenes with dolls.

Rejected

Sonia's* mother was about 14 when she had her, and only two or three years later, she gave birth to a little boy. Because she'd been impregnated twice while she was underage, the police came to take her to a home for wayward minors. Realizing what was happening, she cried, "I can't leave my baby!" But

as three-year-old Sonia began running to her, this young mother pushed her away and headed into the house to see her infant, instead.

The pain Sonia felt from that rejection never left her, and she didn't see her mother for another 16 years! She bounced in and out of foster care, never receiving the love and caring she so desperately needed, until the last home she was in. By then she was a teenager, and she felt it really didn't matter anymore. Not surprisingly, she exhibited an inability to trust others, and a kind of paranoia about "the system" as an adult. Her tough exterior made it difficult for others to get too close to her, and she was often confrontational and angry.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Paul Tough, in his groundbreaking book, *How Children Succeed*, discusses the role of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) in determining the success potential of a child. According to the research he cites, the more ACEs they endure, the less potential they have for success.

Children who grow up in stressful environments generally find it harder to concentrate, sit still, rebound from disappointments, and follow directions. Many who are labeled with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are really suffering from PTSD! Physical or sexual abuse in the home, gang-related violence, and neighborhood and school bullying can all lead to a PTSD state, through which children have to make

many mental compensations in order to cope with their reality. As Paul Tough said, "When you're overwhelmed by uncontrollable impulses and distracted by negative feelings, it's hard to learn the alphabet."

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Show You Care

According to kidshealth.org, you can help your children cope with stress by telling them that you notice when they're bothered by something. Be sympathetic, show that you care and want to understand. You should also listen to your child. Ask them to tell you what's wrong. Avoid any urge to judge, blame, or lecture. You may need to seek professional help for your child, depending on the severity of the reaction.

Pray for your children and teach them to lean on the everlasting arms of Jesus. Teach them that He is their best Friend, and that He cares about what they're going through. Help them develop good leisure time activities such as watching Dare to Dream, and be an example of a balanced life. ☺

*Sonia is a pseudonym.