Transitions, trauma and resilience
(1) About transitions

- Transitions are changes that change us
  - Life stages
    - Baby, child, adolescent, adult, mid-life, old age
  - Socially determined transitions
    - Going to school, leaving school, further or higher education, entering employment, retirement
  - Culturally determined transitions
    - Becoming part of a religious community, becoming adult, marriage, parenthood, old age
  - Transitions arising from individual circumstances
    - Moving house, forming a new household, having a child, becoming unemployed, having a serious illness or accident, becoming disabled, being involved in a disaster, winning the lottery

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(9) Transitions and trauma

- All transitions are stressful
  - Whether or not they are desired changes
- Vulnerable people often cannot regulate stress
  - Developmental trauma – never having developed the ability to regulate stress
  - Emotional trauma – impaired ability to regulate stress as a result of living through extreme stress events
- Without the ability to regulate stress all transitions may be traumatic
  - Leading to acquired brain injury as a result of the unregulated stress
(2) About trauma

- Trauma means injury

- In the context of recent research on brain function, trauma has a specialised meaning – it means **acquired brain injury as a result of unregulated stress**
  - Usually stress is good for us – when we can regulate stress, it enables us to function at our best
  - But when for some reason we are not able to regulate stress we receive an overdose of stress hormones that is toxic to the brain – traumatic stress
  - Changed blood supply to key brain areas then leads to lasting injuries, from which we will need to recover

- Trauma is a normal part of human life
(3) What leads to unregulated stress?

- Two key factors
  - The extent of the stress
  - Our vulnerability – how able we are to self-regulate

- Some stress is so great that anyone would be injured by it
- Some people are so vulnerable that any stress may injure them

- Everyone is vulnerable to trauma
  - Resilience and vulnerability change constantly
(4) What makes us vulnerable?

- Being physically or emotionally depleted
  - Health
  - Grief and loss
  - Other external stresses

- Lacking resilience
  - Chronic depletion – health, prolonged duress, multiple losses
  - Previous unresolved trauma
  - Unmet attachment needs from early childhood
(5) Vulnerable people ..

- .. may be less able to self-regulate stress
  - They may quickly become hyperaroused
  - They may dissociate and be switched off
  - They may alternate between these extremes
  - They may be driven by unmet baby needs to generate stress in others around them, especially those with whom they have an attachment relationship

- .. are more likely to be traumatised
  - Being unable to self-regulate they can be injured by stresses that would not injure someone more resilient
(6) Most people most of the time ...

- ... recover spontaneously from traumatic events

- Three factors are needed for spontaneous recovery
  - Safety
    - We can't begin to recover from traumatic events until we feel safe enough
  - Secure social networks with well-formed attachment relationships
    - Trauma changes us, and the people who love us keep safe our identity and provide an arena for us to recover brain function
  - The ability to express what has happened
    - Adults use language, reactivating the brain
    - Children act out or play out trauma and need adults to put in the words to get the brain working
If not able to recover spontaneously, people are said to be traumatised.

Traumatised people may find it difficult to:

- Self-regulate – stress, mood, impulses
- Process information accurately – make sense of the world around them and of their inner world of feelings
- Make and maintain relationships – understand and be interested in the inner world of others

These difficulties have an impact on everyone involved.

In addition, those who live and work with the traumatised person may be affected by secondary trauma:

- Attitudes and behaviour may change
- The network around the victim of trauma may disintegrate
(8) Phases of recovery

- Recovery from post traumatic stress disorders does not happen all at once or in a straight line
- Trauma disrupts physiological, psychological and social functioning: three levels of harm
- There are three main phases of recovery
  - Stabilisation: recovering or developing the ability to self-regulate
  - Integration: converting traumatic arousal into safe memories
  - Adaptation: connecting or reconnecting with the world around
    - Each phase must address each of the three levels of harm
- Stabilisation underpins recovery, and the recovering person will constantly need to revisit this phase while they integrate and adapt
(10) About resilience

- Resilience is the ability to survive and thrive under difficult conditions
  - Resilient people continue to develop to their own potential even when circumstances are against them

- Resilience develops and is exercised through meeting challenges successfully
  - Vulnerability and resilience fluctuate
  - On this day at this time

- Resilience is different from coping
  - Survival but at a cost to healthy development

- Individual and social factors contribute to resilience
(11) The ecology of human development

- Human development takes place within a social network
- Bronfenbrenner identifies four ecological levels
  - The microsystem
    - The individual and immediate attachment figures
  - The mesosystem
    - Family and kinship groups
  - The exosystem
    - Significant others in contact with the individual
  - The macrosystem
    - The wider community making decisions affecting the individual
- Resilience factors occur at all these levels

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(12) Resilience and transitions

- Think of a transition in your own life which you feel you worked through successfully
  - What happened?
  - What did you lose as a result?
  - What did you gain?

- What helped you to come through successfully?

- What do you think is the link between resilience and successful transitions?
(13) Resilience is the key to successful transitions

People manage transitions successfully because they:

- Have previous experience of successful transitions
- Believe in their own efficacy
- Can tolerate stress
- Have a problem solving approach
- Know how to get help from others
- Have support form family and friends

They survive and thrive because they are resilient

Promoting resilience is the most effective way to enable children and young people to grow through any transitions in their lives

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(14) The six domains of resilience

Factors increasing resilience can be organised into six domains (Daniel and Wassell, 2002)

- Secure base
- Friendships
- Positive values
- Social competencies
- Education
- Talents and interests

Each of these domains occurs at every ecological level

Resilience can be actively promoted in any domain at any level

- Increasing resilience at any point increases overall resilience
(15) Secure base

- When children and young people are most resilient they:
  - Have a sense of safety and security
  - Have a stable relationship with at least one key safe attachment figure
  - Have significant other people who are stable figures in their lives
  - Live within a wider community that is stable and supportive

- When any of these is diminished the child or young person is more vulnerable
  - Depletion across more than one dimension results in complex vulnerability

- Traumatised people live with permanent fear, and cannot feel safe and secure
(16) Friendships

When children and young people are most resilient they:
- Understand friendship and can make and keep friends
- Are supported in their friendships by their attachment figures
- Have significant other people who support their friendships
- Live within a community that provides opportunities to make friends

When any of these is diminished the child or young person is more vulnerable
- Depletion across more than one dimension results in complex vulnerability

Traumatised people find it more difficult to attune to others, to manage their own feelings and moods and to enjoy friendships
(17) Positive values

- When children and young people are most resilient they:
  - Understand feelings and show age-appropriate moral reasoning
  - Have attachment figures who promote emotional literacy and moral reasoning
  - Have significant other people who promote positive values
  - Live within a wider community that promotes positive values

- When any of these is diminished the child or young person is more vulnerable
  - Depletion across more than one dimension results in complex vulnerability

- Traumatised people find it difficult to understand feelings, to manage their own impulses, and to engage in moral reasoning

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(18) Social competencies

- When children and young people are most resilient they:
  - Show appropriate autonomy and self-belief
  - Have attachment figures who promote social competence
  - Have significant other people promoting social competence
  - Live within a community providing opportunities to practice social competence

- When any of these is diminished the child or young person is more vulnerable
  - Depletion across more than one dimension results in complex vulnerability

- Traumatised people live in survival mode, and find it difficult to believe in themselves or show competence in social life

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When children and young people are most resilient they:

- Perform to their full potential in education
- Have attachment figures who enjoy and promote learning
- Have significant others who promote learning
- Live within a community that provides education to meet their needs

When any of these is diminished the child or young person is more vulnerable

- Depletion across more than one dimension results in complex vulnerability

Traumatised people have difficulty with self-regulation, with making sense of the world, and with social relationships all of which have an impact on education
(20) Talents and interests

- When children and young people are most resilient they:
  - Enjoy activities and interests that support and promote their talents
  - Have attachment figures who promote talents and encourage interests
  - Have significant others who promote talents and encourage interests
  - Have local opportunities to develop talents and pursue interests

- When any of these is diminished the child or young person is more vulnerable
  - Depletion across more than one dimension results in complex vulnerability

- Traumatised people live in survival mode and have low self-esteem, making it difficult to recognise talents or be motivated to pursue interests

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(21) Working with the child or young person to promote successful transitions

- Working to recognise and promote resilience is the most effective preparation for any transition
  - It is essential when working on resilience to work closely with the child or young person
- Assessing resilience is an intervention which in itself can contribute to preparing for transitions
  - Recognising areas of resilience develops strengths and confidence
  - Noting areas of vulnerability at any ecological level can enable the child or young person to develop ideas about
    - WHAT will enable them to build the resilience they need
    - WHO can help them with this
(22) Helping children and young people to manage transitions

- Resilience maps can be used to help children and young people manage transitions successfully.

- Once they have assessed and mapped their current state of resilience, they can use the map to think about areas at any ecological level where they have more or less resilience.

- They can then further develop ideas about positive action to address areas of vulnerability.
  - In any domain
  - At any ecological level
    - WHAT will enable them to build the resilience they need
    - WHO can help them with this
(23) The support network for the child in mind

Who are the key people who constitute the first layers of the support network for the child or young person?

- Family members?
- Friends?
- School or college staff?
- Support worker?
- Social worker?
- Therapist?
- Community activity leaders?
- Religious community leaders?
(24) Encouraging and enabling the network to promote resilience

- What impact do each of these key network members have in each domain of resilience?
  - Secure base
  - Friendships
  - Positive values
  - Social competencies
  - Education
  - Talents and interests

- What will enable them to promote resilience effectively for this child or young person?

- How can the child or young person engage these key people in the work of promoting resilience?
(25) The contribution of the wider community

Who are key people in the wider community who have an impact on the resilience of the child or young person and their family?

- School/college management team or governors?
- Health service providers or managers?
- Managers of services for children and families?
- Local councillors?
- Activity providers or cultural organisations?
(26) Engaging the community

- There may be interventions at the level of the whole community that will have a significant impact on the ability of this child or young person to build resilience.

- Helping the child and family members to undertake systemic interventions is a positive contribution to developing resilience.

- Examples might include:
  - Working with designated teachers to train school governors on the needs of children and young people in transition.
  - Writing to managers of services for children and families.
  - Talking to local councillors about activities available locally that could enable children and young people to build resilience.
(27) To sum up ... 

- Transitions are changes that change us
- Transitions are stressful and can be traumatic
  - If a child or young person is traumatised they can recover
- Resilience is the key to successful transitions
  - And successful transitions build resilience
- Mapping resilience can help children and young people and their families to address areas of vulnerability and to build resilience
  - Recognising and developing strengths
  - Mobilising the social network and the community