Welcome
The Adoption Exchange is proud to present:

“Generational Trauma”
Lauren Fishbein

Please Keep in Mind:
• All lines will be muted during the presentation.
• Please use the Q&A feature to submit questions and they will be addressed throughout the training.

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Generational Trauma

By: Lauren Fishbein, MA, RP
What is Generational Trauma?

- Also called Intergenerational or Transgenerational Trauma is the idea that trauma can be carried down the family line.

- It stems from a traumatic event(s) that began years prior to the current generation and has impacted the ways in which individuals within a family understand, cope with, and heal from trauma.

- African-Americans, Holocaust survivors, Native Americans, Estonians, are examples of populations of people who have been impacted by generational trauma.

- Genocides, civil wars, and natural disasters can produce traumatic effects that reverberate for several generations, affecting clients’ perspectives, hopes, cognitive styles and personalities.
Cherry Blossom Experiment
Rachel Yehuda, PhD and Epigenetics

- Her team discovered that the descendants of people who survived the Holocaust have different stress hormone profiles than their peers, they focused on a stress gene linked to PTSD, depression, and mood and anxiety disorders. In the survivors and children this specific gene was in opposing directions. This could indicate that "[The children] may inherit traits that promote resilience as well as vulnerability."

- The field of epigenetics sees that genes can be turned on and off and expressed differently through changes in environment and behavior.

- Her take away is: "The implications are that what happens to our parents, or perhaps even to our grandparents or previous generations, may help shape who we are on a fundamental molecular level that contributes to our behaviors, beliefs, strengths, and vulnerabilities."

- "We’re just starting to understand that just because you’re born with a certain set of genes, you’re not in a biologic prison as a result of those genes – that changes can be made to how those genes function, that can help," -Rachel Yehuda
Questions To Ask…

- What is the history of your child’s birth country?
- What was happening when they were born?
- What is their biological family history?
- What is their adoptive family history?
- What is your country’s history and how did you get to the USA?
- What is your family’s trauma history?
- What trauma are you carrying in you?
- How is your parenting coming from a place of your family’s trauma?
- What cycles are you passing down versus breaking?
I work with a parent who says dinner is the hardest time for him. When asking questions on and trying to figure it out we came to the discovery that he is Irish, he grew up eating beans and potatoes. When his kids leave food on their plate he gets angry and yells at them (3 & 6 years old). He was stressed every day even before making dinner and was furious by the time it was over. He grew up with the idea that you MUST eat every piece of food on your plate. When his kids didn’t he felt disrespected but on a deep, unconscious level. He realized that this was from his childhood. We ended on a positive outlook – your kids get to not eat every chicken nugget because you do have money now, you do have security and you will have the ability to buy more food. By not enforcing this rule allows dad to not react so intensely and dad gets to tend to himself “I am no longer starving. I am able to feed myself and my family”. And it teaches your kids to know when they are full. He was able to reframe his lens and he was able to break this cycle that was passed down for generations. He now, mostly, enjoys dinner and does not take his anger out on his kids.
Trauma; It Isn’t What You Think

- It is all about perception. One thing can deeply impact one person and it will have little or no effect on someone else.

- Big T: Most people think of trauma as a Big T – serious injury, assault, natural disasters, or any life-threatening experience, etc.
  - Mostly associated with a PTSD diagnosis

- Little t: A trauma that is highly distressing on a personal level. Some examples include: being bullied, someone close to you passes away (friend, family, pet, or celebrity), emotional abuse, parent who was not emotionally available, bee sting/dog bite, etc.
  - Can add up if you have had many of these experiences (ACEs)
Can you think of some examples for yourself and/or your family?
How it Relates to Adoptee’s

- Adoptee’s have at least 3 layers of Generational Trauma

- Adoption is a trauma, for some it is a “Big T” and for others it is a “Little t”

- Each person is unique, remember it is all about perception! No human is the same, no adoptee is the same.

- Adoption Fog - that hazy, confused state in which one is redefining one’s outlook on adoption. May include questioning long-held assurances, seeing the adoption experience in a new light, now without rose-colored glasses. (Definition by Laura Dennis)
Flying to Germany with my Family

As a Jew I grew up learning about the Holocaust. My family was in this country because of WWII. Most of my friends are Jewish and I went to the Jewish middle school so I was surrounded by this conversation often. When I was 24 I was traveling with my family through Europe and we flew through Frankfurt. When we arrived I automatically felt panic and anxiety. I was really confused why, I am a well versed traveler and never felt this before. I realized what “Germany” meant to me and to my family’s history. I felt uneasy. I remembered a story my teacher told about her getting off a train in NYC, she was wearing a Star of David, a woman ran up to her and grabbed it and yelled at her to "take it off!" and told her she was not safe. Now, maybe this person was struggling with mental illness or maybe it was her own trauma. I am not sure but this story and growing up learning about the Holocaust deeply impacted me when I arrived in Germany for the first time.
How it Relates to Parenting

- Your history impacts you right now and it impacts how you show up in each moment of every day.

- How you parent (nurture) plays a key role in how your kids interpret the world. We learn mostly through observation – you are constantly modeling for your kids, often unconsciously.

- Are you able to regulate your nervous system when it comes to stressful situations or are you reenacting your childhood and becoming more like your mom, dad, grandparents?

- Ask yourself: what patterns am I carrying that were passed down? (anxiety, depression, paranoia, angry outbursts, abuse cycles, codependency)
The Myth... "It’s In My Genes, I Can’t Change"

- "The passing on of illness through DNA is 25%" – David Sinclair

- Everything we do and interact with influences how our DNA is expressed. You can change the way your DNA is expressed through lifestyle and thoughts. (Dr. Joe Dispenza, Dr. Robert V. Gerard, Dr. Kelly Brogan)

- Things that impact your gene expression: Nutrition, stress level, movement/exercise, environment- toxins

- Things that support your health: interpersonal work- understanding your thoughts and your trauma history, movement/exercise, eating healthy – looking at labels, living in the present moment, removing toxins from your home (Dr. Bronner’s, natural cleaners, natural shampoo/soaps)

- Feed your kids food from the country they were born in.
Ways To Stop The Cycle

- Acknowledge and teach the history of your child’s birth country to them. Talk about things that were happening when they were born, give them context.
- Acknowledge that you do not understand their experience but want to support them in understanding why they are the way they are.
- Know that all kids/teens will not want to talk about this, make space for it anyway. (podcasts, shows, books, articles, documentaries)
- Acknowledge your family history and how it has impacted you and how it impacts you as a person – be the model for them.
- Change your lifestyle to support the life you want to live, not the life you have been unconsciously living.
- Focus on the **PRESENT** – nutrition, self-care, movement. Tend to your body and emotions.
Questions or Comments?
Resources

Books:
Change Your DNA Change Your life by Dr. Robert Gerard
Childhood Disrupted: How Your Biography Becomes Your Biology, and How You Can Heal by Donna Jackson Nakazawa
No Drama Discipline by Dr. Daniel Siegel and Dr. Tina Bryson
Whole Brain Child by Dr. Daniel Siegel and Dr. Tina Bryson
Codependency for Dummies by Darlene Lancer
Attached by Amir Levine
The Primal Wound by Nacy Verrier
Scattered: How Attention Deficit Disorder Originates and What You Can Do about It by Dr. Gabor Maté
Contact

- **Finger to the Moon Counseling**
- **Lauren@fingertothemooncounseling.com**

Parent coaching- on line

Therapy in person- Boulder & Littleton
References

Cherry Blossom Experiment

Trauma; it isn’t what you think it is

Rachel Yehuda PhD
Rachel Yehuda PhD
Epigenetics
Post presentation Update

1. Because it is impossible to know if what you are seeing is Generational Trauma or not – work in the moment. Use Connect and Redirect by Dr. Daniel Siegel to work with them versus trying to categorize what type of trauma it is. Connect with them around what emotion is arising and support them through that. That is how to help them work through big emotions and integrate.

2. An EMDR practitioner in the chat told me that it does work for kids younger than 10.
Post presentation resources

Adoptee’s on – podcast
Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
Adoptee directory for therapists

Books:
The Primal Wound by Nancy Verrier
No Drama Discipline by Dr. Daniel Siegel and Dr. Tina Bryson
Whole Brain Child by Dr. Daniel Siegel and Dr. Tina Bryson