

Biopsychosocial, & Eco-Spiritual Model

For Children and Adolescent

By Dr. Ani Kalayjian

The Mental Health Outreach Program developed by Dr. Kalayjian utilizes this seven-step model, through which various aspects of traumatic exposure are assessed, identified, explored, processed, worked through, and reintegrated.

This innovative and integrative model incorporates various theories including: psychodynamic, interpersonal (Sullivan, 1953), existential and humanistic (Frankl, 1962), Electromagnetic Field Balancing (EMF, Dubro & Lapierre, 2002), Forgiveness & Reconciliation (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2010), Learning Theory, Flower Essences, Essential Oils, physical release (van der Kolk, 1987), and mind-body-spirit chakra balancing, prayers and meditation.

The following are the seven-steps of the Biopsychosocial, & Eco-Spiritual Model focused on working with children and their families

- I. **Assess Levels of Post Traumatic Stress:** The child's level of posttraumatic stress symptomatology & other symptoms is assessed through observations during play and art therapy. Parents and other caretakers level of trauma is assessed through the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire.
- II. **Encourage Expression of Feelings:** Children are encouraged to express their feelings through art and play therapy. In post natural as well as human-made disaster the predominant feelings expressed in children are fear, anger, disruptive and avoidance behaviors, sleep disturbances & nightmares.
- III. **Provide Empathy and Validation:** Children's feelings will be validated using statements such as "I can understand..." or that "It makes sense to me..." and that it is a normal feeling, and that it will go away. Also used is intentional therapeutic touch, such as holding a child's hand. Here it will be reinforced that the child's feelings of grief, fear, anger, as well as joy of surviving are all natural responses to the disaster, and need to be expressed. When trauma ruptures the child's links with the group, an intolerable sense of isolation and helplessness may occur. Providing validation and empathy will correct these effects by reestablishing the mutual exchange between the child and the others. Family therapy is provided in this setting to help parents and caretakers overcome their own trauma so as to aid their children in a healthy way.
- IV. **Encourage Discovery & Expression of Meaning:** Children will be asked "What lessons, meaning or positive lessons did you discover as a result of this experience?" This question is based on Viktor Frankl's logotherapeutic principles: That there could be a positive meaning discovered in the worst catastrophe. As well as the Buddhist assertions that it takes darkness to appreciate and reconnect with light. The child will be invited to focus on the strengths and meanings that naturally arise out of any disaster, and based on their age, lessons

could be extracted from the stories that they shared. Some of the positive lessons shared by children are: Mommy and Daddy are alive, that is most important then the demolished house or car, its better to love than to fight, its better to forgive than hold a grudge, when Mommy and Daddy are happy they show their love to me more.

V. **Provide Didactic Information:** Practical tools and information are given on how to gradually overcome fears, utilizing the systematic desensitization process. The importance of preparation will be reinforced and how to prepare will be role played. Handouts will be given to teachers and prospective group leaders on how to conduct disaster evacuation drills and create safe and accessible exits. Booklets will be given to parents and teachers on how to relate to their children's nightmares, fears and disruptive behaviors. Assessment tools will be given to psychologists and psychiatrists. Handouts will be provided on grief as well as how to take care of oneself as a caregiver.

VI. **Eco centered processing:** Practical tools are shared to connect with Gaia, Mother Earth. Discussions and exercises conducted around environmental connections. Ways to care for one's environment are shared. Starting right in the class room, their homes, and expanding to the larger globe, being mindful of system's perspective and how we can impact our environment, and how the environment in tern impacts us. A list of mindful acts is shared to help co-create an emerald green world. Children are encouraged to engage in tasks centered on caring for their surroundings and making their environment beautiful through chores such as cleaning, gardening, organizing, and color coding, etc.

VII. **Provide Breathing and Movement Exercises:** Breath is used as a natural medicine, and a healing tool. Since no one can control nature, others and what happens outside of one's self, children are assisted in controlling how they respond to fear and disaster. This will be an experiential section of the model. Children are provided instructions how to move their body to release fear, uncertainty and anger. In addition, children are instructed on how to use breath towards self-empowerment as well as to engender gratitude, compassion, faith, strength, and forgiveness. Children are engaged in enjoyable exercises to allow for physical release and chakra balancing.

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