

## **NCCTS Leadership:**

### **Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma**

In response to the nationwide need for mental health practitioners who are proficient in providing treatment for traumatized children and adolescents, the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (NCCTS) is leading the development of a Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma, working closely with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). The Core Curriculum will serve as a major training vehicle for educating mental health practitioners about traumatic stress in children and adolescents, with the goal of expanding the nationwide mental health workforce, which will be able to provide trauma-focused treatments for youth and their families that are evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive.

The development of evidence-based, manualized treatments has raised the standard of mental health care for trauma-exposed children nationwide. However, NCCTS' efforts to disseminate these treatments across NCTSN have highlighted the need for additional professional training that extends beyond teaching practitioners to implement specific treatment protocols. To this end, the Core Curriculum can serve as both basic training for practitioners who lack experience in trauma-focused work and a resource for the continuing education of experienced practitioners who wish to broaden and refine their areas of expertise.

A long-term goal of NCCTS is to help graduate training programs in social work, psychology, medicine, nursing, marriage and family therapy, and related fields to incorporate trauma-focused training (through the Core Curriculum) into their curricula. Supporting this effort, the American Psychological Association's Division 56 (Trauma Psychology) has recently issued a call for the systematic inclusion of trauma-focused training into the curricula of mainstream clinical psychology programs.

The Core Curriculum is designed to enhance practitioners' understanding of the nature of a traumatic experience from the perspective of the child or adolescent and the ways in which traumatic experiences and their aftermath influence his or her life. These insights are intended to increase practitioners' ability to provide the youths and their families with effective, individually tailored mental health services that reflect the family's needs and strengths, cultural background, developmental level, and life circumstances.

## Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma

When completed, the Core Curriculum will consist of three main parts:

- *Core Concepts*, or basic principles and knowledge regarding trauma-focused treatment
- *Core Components*, or basic treatment elements of trauma-focused treatment, and
- *Core Skills*, or essential clinical proficiencies in trauma-focused treatment

These three parts respectively address the “*why we do what we do*,” “*what to do*,” and “*how to do it*” questions that undergird developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive trauma treatments for youths and their families. These Core Concepts center around fundamental principles associated with working with trauma-exposed children and their families.

The primary goals of the Core Curriculum are to:

- Serve as a basic training curriculum that covers a broad range of core elements common to many trauma-focused treatments, such as psychoeducation and strengthening coping skills
- Help practitioners engage in case conceptualization in ways that center on an empathetic understanding of the youth’s life and individual trauma experience, rather than only on his or her symptom profile or type of trauma exposure
- Provide practitioners with greater flexibility in treatment planning by helping them balance the advantages of adhering to a manualized treatment protocol with the advantages of tailoring interventions to reflect the specific needs, strengths, and living circumstances of each youth and family
- Help practitioners develop strength-based treatment plans that aim to both reduce distress and dysfunction, and promote wellness and positive youth development

### Accomplishments and Results

In 2005, NCTSN members began an active collaboration to develop a Core Curriculum and have made considerable progress since that time. The NCTSN Core Curriculum on Child Trauma Task Force met at an expert panel consensus meeting in August 2007, and have developed working drafts of the Core Concepts portion of the Core Curriculum, including:

- A Curriculum Overview, with a course prologue, a description of curriculum materials, directions and resources for facilitators, and a master glossary. The prologue lays out the background of the curriculum and provides an explanation of its conceptual framework, including a description of the Core Concepts, Core Components, and Core Skills sections.

## Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma

- Five detailed “Case Study Walk-throughs,” each of which provides an entire case vignette that is explored and conceptualized from beginning to end. The vignettes cover preschool, early elementary, late elementary, early adolescent, and late adolescent age groups.
- Twelve “Core Concepts” modules, in which a particular fundamental principle is illustrated via the use of three to five case vignette excerpts.

The Facilitator’s Guides and Participant Materials are currently being pilot tested with graduate students and practicing clinicians, and revised with the assistance of expert writers.

### Vision for the Future

After the print version of the Core Concepts portion of the Core Curriculum is completed, NCCTS will work with the NCTSN Core Curriculum Task Force to:

- Develop an online version of the Core Concepts portion of the Core Curriculum in 2010. The Core Curriculum Team is consulting with an instructional designer to maintain consistency between the print and online curricula, as well as to identify unique features that will only be available online.
- Develop both the *Core Components* and the *Core Skills* portions of the Curriculum. NCCTS is initiating a partnership with experts in distilling treatment protocols into their core constituent treatment components. The goal of this partnership is to develop a manual for coding trauma-focused treatment manuals, and to code a selected number of treatment manuals developed or adapted by NCTSN. Findings from this project will serve as a strong foundation upon which the Core Components and Core Skills sections of the Core Curriculum can be built, for which a second Expert Panel Consensus Meeting is tentatively planned for Summer 2010.
- Work in cooperation with governing bodies across a range of mental health disciplines, as well as with individual programs, to incorporate the Core Curriculum into graduate and post-doctoral clinical training programs, including social work, psychology, counseling, medicine, nursing, and marriage and family therapy.
- Adapt the Core Curriculum for non-clinicians who work in various child service systems, such as child welfare, school settings, and juvenile justice, through ongoing collaborative relationships with national organizations.