

Trauma Case Studies

Part 1 - What is trauma?

Case Study 1

Sam grew up in a supportive family. Sam was successful at school and had many friends. Whilst at university Sam experienced a physical assault at a party, which led to a hospital admission. Since then, Sam has become anxious and feels threatened around other people. Sam no longer attends university and is unable to find work. Sam has flashbacks and is constantly vigilant when away from home. Sam has not told anyone about these feelings due to feelings of shame and self-blame.

Sam's parents say Sam has become moody, snappy, and lazy.

Case Study 2

Charley grew up in a violent household where Mum and Dad had violent arguments on a regular basis which sometimes turned physical. Charley had some friends at school but found it hard to concentrate in lessons and so was often called disruptive by teachers. Charley's current relationship is verbally violent with insults and swearing at each other the basis of how they communicate.

Charley has police cautions for fighting and is described by some people as an angry person.

Case study 3

Bobby grew up in an abusive household where Mum and Dad would hit out and lock Bobby in a cupboard randomly. Bobby started avoiding school from a young age and finds it difficult to relate to others in any meaningful way.

Bobby appears to be kind and helpful and is described by friends as a good laugh who can be a little moody.

Part 2 - What is trauma informed practice?

Case study 1

During the assault Sam's survival system took over choosing 'flight' mode and Sam's memory has been updated to include this traumatic event, meaning the world and the people in it are not perceived as being as safe as previously. Due to Sam's shift in perspective, safe events which would have previously been ignored by the survival

system, are now perceived as potentially threatening and the primitive brain is on high alert whenever Sam is around crowds of people. The survival system protects Sam by using 'flight mode to keep him away from potentially harmful situations and 'fight' mode when challenged.

Case Study 2

For Charley growing up in a hostile household was terrifying. Small children need stability, safety, and security. The Aggression in the house made this impossible for Charley. Being afraid so much of the time has meant Charley's survival system is easily triggered and Charley will slip into 'fight' mode.

Case study 3

Growing up being physically and emotionally abused and neglected, Bobby has grown up believing that people who say they love you are most likely to cause you harm. This has left Bobby with a problem. All people need to have close personal relationships but, for Bobby these are the biggest threat. Bobby's survival system is constantly switched on. Bobby's brain uses 'friend' mode to reduce the risk of harm and flight when 'friend' does not prevent a perceived attack. For Bobby any criticism or challenge is a threat.

Part 3 - Outcome

For Sam, Charley and Bobby, understanding their trauma response was a relief. They began to see themselves as human, having human responses to their life experiences. They were all able to use their understanding of the window of tolerance to manage their own responses while seeking the support they needed to address their trauma.