Addiction work is trauma work. Recent studies show that as much as 80% of co-occurring clients have histories of trauma (often multiple episodes of trauma). Rates of PTSD and other trauma-related disorders are endemic to addicted populations. Clinicians who see themselves as addiction specialists often feel uncomfortable with the trauma related presentations in substance use disorders; conversely, many skilled trauma therapists have had little training in addiction. This seminar aims to help both groups build the gap in both knowledge and the skills for working with this complex population using new knowledge on the neurobiology of attachment. We will examine the disruptions to healthy attachment patterns and how this predisposes individuals to develop addiction in mid-late teen years. Early experiences alter gene expression and brain development: exposure to an environment of disrupted attachment, persistent fear, trauma-related experiences, and exposure to substances all have significant effects on the developing brain. This new science of attachment and neurobiology can be a guide to effective treatment interventions with addicted individuals. Both theory and implications for technique will be explored.

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Learning Objectives

1. Describe three ways in which normal brain development is disrupted by trauma
2. Apply and understanding of attachment as a core concept in development, and ways that trauma disrupts normal attachment patterns
3. Discuss how brain development affects the emergence of substance use disorders, including in cases where trauma is present
4. Apply knowledge of attachment and development to working with clients who have addiction and/or histories of trauma

Bibliography