Constructivist Self Development Theory
Aspects of the Self Impacted by Psychological Trauma
(Saakvitne & Pearlman)

Frame of Reference

Framework of beliefs through which the individual interprets experience

- Identity: inner experience of self and self in the world, includes customary feeling states
- World view: life philosophy, general attitudes and beliefs about others and the world; values and moral principles; causality
- Spirituality: meaning, hope faith, connection with something beyond oneself, awareness of all aspects of life including the non-material

Self Capacities

Abilities that enable the individual to maintain a sense of self as consistent and coherent across time and situations; intrapersonal

- Ability to experience, tolerate, and integrate strong affect
- Ability to maintain a sense of self as viable, benign, and positive, deserving of life and love
- Ability to maintain an inner sense of connection with others

Ego Resources

Abilities that enable the individual to meet psychological needs and to relate to others; interpersonal

Self-awareness skills

- Intelligence
- Ability to be introspective
- Willpower and initiative
- Ability to strive for personal growth
- Awareness of psychological needs
- Ability to take perspective

Interpersonal and self-protective skills

- Ability to foresee consequences
- Ability to establish mature relations with others
- Ability to establish interpersonal boundaries
- Ability to make self-protective judgments

Psychological Needs and Cognitive Schemas

Safety

Self: to feel reasonably invulnerable to harm inflicted by oneself or others

Other: to feel that valued others are reasonably invulnerable to harm inflicted by oneself or others

Esteem

Self: to feel valued by oneself and others
Other: to value others

Trust/Dependency

Self: to have confidence in one's own judgment and ability to meet one's needs
Other: to have confidence in others to meet one's needs

Control

Self: to feel able to manage one's feelings and behaviors in interpersonal situations
Other: to feel able to manage or exert control over others in interpersonal situations

Intimacy

Self: to feel connected to oneself
Other: to feel connected to others

Memory and Perception

- Verbal: the narrative of what happened before, during and after the trauma
- Imagery: the mental pictures of the traumatic event
- Affect: the emotions related to the trauma
- Somatic: the bodily experiences the represent the traumatic events
- Interpersonal: the relational patterns and behaviors that reflect the abusive traumatic relationships

*Understanding which aspects of self are vulnerable to disruption helps one identify and then transform one's particular experiences of secondary trauma. In the face of trauma each person will adapt and cope given his/her current contexts and early experiences: interpersonal, intrapsychic, familial, cultural and social.