

Vulnerable and developmentally traumatized children online – when trauma leaves dangerous digital traces

In the Trauma Treatment Team GRO, developments over the past 10 years have clearly shown that children and young people who have been affected by abuse and developmental trauma find it difficult to maintain good boundaries, also in the digital world. The purpose of the presentation is to share experiences from working with children and young people who have been sexually abused and/or have themselves abused others online. It is argued that knowledge about neglect, trauma and trauma reactions is important to understand what happens to them online and to help them with safe online behaviour.

Method

Points of attention and concrete professional measures from cases with children/young people with serious self-harming sexual online behavior are reviewed. Particular focus is placed on how dissociation can play out online in risky sexual online behavior and how this can be worked on, including with a focus on strengthening care and mentalization, psychoeducation about trauma and grooming behavior in addition to trauma treatment. An example is given of how the Sleeping Dogs Method® is used to prioritize and plan a trauma-oriented treatment effort in these very complex cases.

Results

The experiences from therapeutic work with a mentalizing, attachment- and trauma-focused approach have meant that the children's risky online behavior is reduced, and that they increasingly seek help from caregivers and share difficult experiences with them, both those that take place online and offline.

Conclusion

If we do not know about and take into account trauma reactions, including dissociation and re-staging of trauma, when the most vulnerable children go online, we may find it difficult to understand what can cause them to end up in very unsafe and risky situations, and thus cannot offer them relevant help.

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