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**The Creative Exposure Intervention as Part of Clinical Treatment  
for Adolescents Exposed to Bullying and Experiencing  
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms**

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# The Creative Exposure Intervention as Part of Clinical Treatment for Adolescents Exposed to Bullying and Experiencing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms\*

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NYU Presentation 2020

# Presentation Overview

- ▶ Research demonstrates that bullying is a potential risk factor for the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among adolescents (Crosby, Oehler, & Capaccioli, 2010).
- ▶ Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness training, and art therapy techniques are garnering attention in the counseling literature for their effective treatment of PTSD (Barlow, 2014; Bazargan & Pakdaman, 2016; Bernstein, Tanay, & Vujanovic, 2011).
- ▶ This presentation introduces an eclectic intervention, incorporating these three techniques, designed for work with adolescents experiencing bully-related PTSD symptoms. The presentation includes a case example to illustrate Creative Exposure, which can be used in one session or across multiple sessions.
- ▶ This technique is intended for use by counselors with the credentials and training to provide trauma treatment.

# Introduction

\*The content of this Presentation is based on: Sosin, L., & Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. (2016). The Creative Exposure Intervention as part of clinical treatment for adolescents exposed to bullying and experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. *Journal of Creativity and Mental Health, 11, 3-4, 391-408.*

# Prevalence

Over the past decade, researchers have estimated that approximately 70% to 85% of children and adolescents experience bullying (Berger, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Malecki et al., 2015; Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

# Bullying

Any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm.

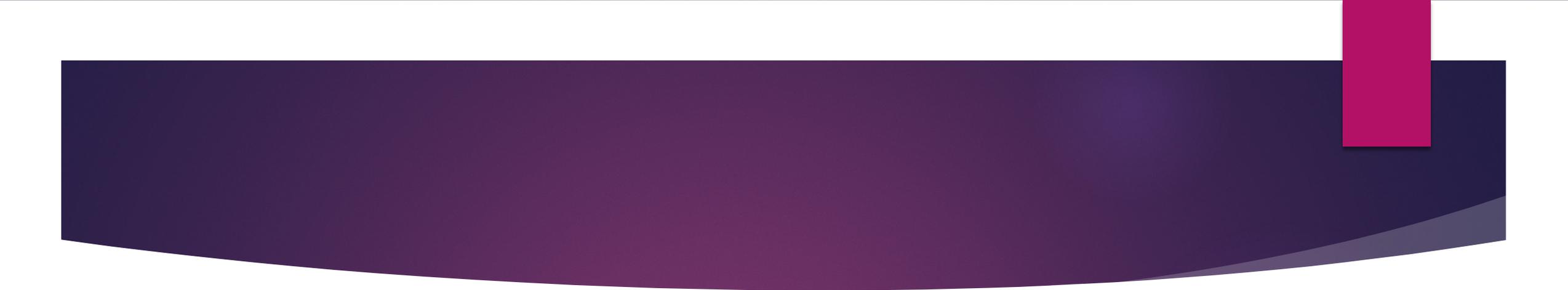
(Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, and Lumpkin, 2014, p. 17)

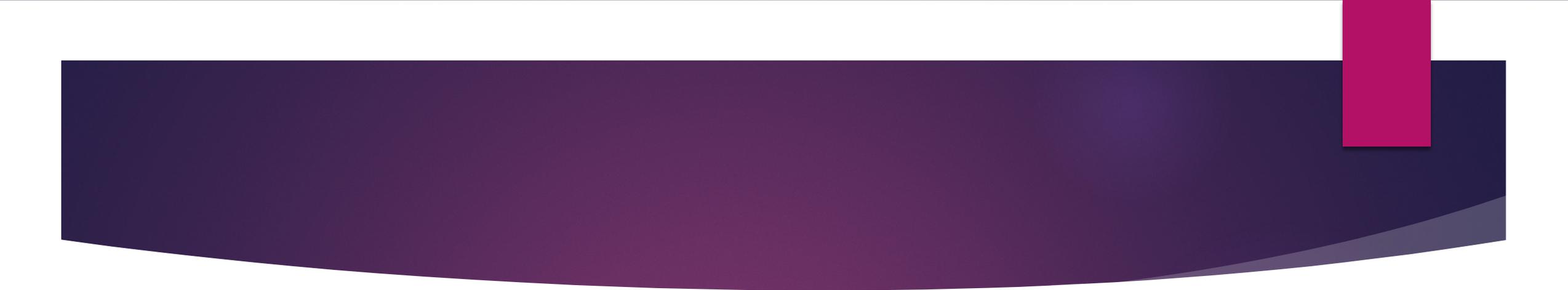
# Effects of Bullying

- ▶ The consequences of bullying and exposure are severe.
- ▶ According to Arseneault, Bowes, and Shakoor (2010), being a target of bullying is predictive of childhood mental health problems.
- ▶ Consequences of being bullied include anxiety, low self-esteem, suicidal ideations, suicide attempts, poor academic performance, and school absenteeism (Baly, Cornell, & Lovegrove, 2014; Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Hase, Goldberg, Smith, Stuck, & Campaign, 2015; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011; Knack, Jensen-Campbell, & Baum, 2011; Marshall, Arnold, Rolon-Arroyo, & Griffith, 2015).

# Bullying and PTSD Symptoms

- ▶ Research is beginning to demonstrate that exposure to bullying is a potential risk factor for the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Crosby, Oehler, & Capaccioli, 2010; Mynard, Joseph, & Alexander, 2000), such as trauma-specific re-enactment, frightening dreams, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, diminished interest in activities once found enjoyable, and somatic symptoms such as headaches.

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- ▶ Given these statistics and research findings, counselors working with children and adolescents are finding themselves, more so than in the past, treating targets of bullying, many of whom are experiencing PTSD symptoms.
  - ▶ Unfortunately, due to the lack of research on bullying related PTSD, a deficiency of clinical treatments exists (Malove, 2014). As a result, treatment approaches and interventions that integrate various theoretical approaches are needed.

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- ▶ I originally developed the Creative Exposure Intervention (Sosin, 2015, 2016) as a tool to support an adolescent client who experienced bullying that resulted in PTSD symptoms.
  - ▶ Creative Exposure is a treatment tool that draws from an eclectic therapeutic approach.
  - ▶ This presentation includes information about this intervention and an outline of the process for implementing it.
  - ▶ Creative Exposure is intended for use by mental health practitioners with the credentials and training to provide trauma treatment.

# Theoretical Framework

Creative Exposure incorporates cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness techniques, and art therapy techniques.

# Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

- ▶ CBT is a present-oriented, solution-focused approach to counseling aimed at helping clients minimize their emotional disturbances and self-defeating behaviors by acquiring a more realistic and workable philosophy of life (Beck, 1976; Ellis, 2004).
- ▶ From a CBT perspective, problems are viewed as inner-related, maladaptive ways of thinking (e.g., “I am worthless”), ways of acting (e.g., poor assertiveness), ways of feeling (e.g., shame), and ways of dealing with physiological problems.
- ▶ Change, therefore, requires clients to take an active role in replacing maladaptive cognitive processes with adaptive processes, behaviors that are not working with ones that do work, and emotional distress with more productive emotions.

# ...Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- ▶ In vivo imagery, or imagery rescripting, is a commonly used and longstanding technique in CBT (Beck, 1976; Van Der Kolk & Van Der Hart, 1989).
- ▶ An adapted version of in vivo imagery, is central to the Creative Exposure Intervention.
- ▶ For decades, researchers and counselors recommended and provided evidence for the use of imagery rescripting as an effective treatment to reduce PTSD symptoms (see Arntz & Weertman, 1999; Hirsch & Holmes, 2007).
- ▶ The technique has been effective for the treatment of childhood abuse survivors (Smucker, Dancu, Foa, & Niederee, 1995; Wild & Clark, 2011) and adolescents who experienced trauma (Heyes, Lau, & Holmes, 2013).