

Review
“Does Child Abuse Permanently Alter the Human Brain?”
presented by Martin Teicher, MD, PhD
Reviewed by Diane Spindler, LMHC, LMFT

On April 30th NESTTD sponsored a half day workshop with Dr. Martin Teicher, M.D.,Ph.D. on “Does Child Abuse Permanently Alter the Human Brain” to a large spellbound audience. By comparing control groups, who were not abused as children, with groups who had received various types of abuse as children, he was able to show through different types of brain scans of the two groups how the brain became damaged in the latter groups. He also presented evidence that children who had been abused and show brain damage had higher incidents of dissociation, depression, anxiety, and drugs and/or alcohol abuse.

Dr. Teicher presented these findings in a clear and concise fashion that was easy to follow. Many of us sat in the audience shaking our heads in agreement as Dr Teicher’s work validated what we were seeing with our patients. As the presentation continued, Dr. Teicher showed evidence that the type of abuse, verbal, physical or sexual, and when it took place in a child’s life corresponded to how apt they were to suffer from dissociation, depression, anxiety, anger, and drug and/or alcohol abuse. He also found that these variables of the type of abuse and when it took place, caused damage to different parts of the brain. Dr Teicher found that verbal abuse by parents of young children and peer abuse, bullying, of teenagers seemed to cause the most negative behavior in adults. During the questions and answers period at the end, during which most people stayed, Dr. Teicher expressed his opinion that the brain was able to heal from such traumas. This is very hopeful news for those of us who work with traumatized clients.

Dr. Teicher has been the Director of the Developmental Biopsychiatry Research Program at McClean Hospital since 1988. He has also served as an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Chief of the Developmental Psychopharmacology Laboratory at the Mailman Research Center since 1990. He has published more than 150 articles and has received numerous honors.