
CHILDREN AND TRAUMA: What can you do?

- **Child traumatic stress** refers to the physical and emotional responses of a child to events that threaten the life or physical integrity of the child or of someone critically important to the child (such as a parent or sibling). Traumatic events can overwhelm a child's capacity to cope. Children may feel terror and powerlessness; they may act out.
- **A child's response to a traumatic event affects his or her perception of self, the world, and the future.** The child may have difficulty trusting others, feeling safe and navigating daily and long-term transitions.
- **Types of trauma** include acute (response to a single event), chronic (multiple, varied experiences), and complex (responses to multiple interpersonal traumatic events from a young age). Children who have been physically or sexually abused or witnessed violence are more likely to experience trauma, as are children and youth in foster care.
- **An individual child's response to trauma** depends on many factors including age and developmental stage, past experiences, status as a victim or witness, and the presence of protective adults.
- **Key symptoms** of post traumatic stress disorder include:
 - re-experiencing the trauma through nightmares, intrusive memories, etc.
 - intense reactions to cues that resemble an aspect of the trauma
 - avoidance of thoughts, places, and people associated with the trauma
 - emotional numbing (detachment, estrangement, loss of interest)
 - increased arousal (sleep disorders, irritability)
- **To support a child** who has experienced trauma, a caregiver can:
 - Consider how one's knowledge, experience, and cultural frame may influence perceptions of traumatic experiences, their impact, and interventions.
 - Utilize resources the family trusts to supplement available services.
 - Recognize that exposure to trauma is the rule, not the exception, among children in the mental health system.
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of child traumatic stress.
 - Recognize that "bad" behavior is sometimes an adaptation to trauma.
 - Understand the impact of trauma on different developmental domains.
- **Trauma-informed care can benefit children and youth.** Caregivers can recognize the impact trauma has had; help the child to feel safe; help the child to understand and manage overwhelming emotions; help the child to understand and modify problem behaviors; help the child focus on their strengths; be an advocate for the child; and take care of themselves.

