

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR CAREGIVERS

The Impact of Trauma and Ongoing Mental Health Screening

Provided by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families
in partnership with the Health Care Authority
and the University of Washington



What is Trauma?

Trauma is an emotional or physical reaction to an event that is witnessed or experienced by a child that is scary, intense and/or disturbing. Trauma can result from a variety of situations including, but not limited to:

- Witnessing violence within the family or community
- Loss of a loved one due to accident or violence
- Being a victim of neglect or abandonment, physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Natural disasters

Trauma Impact

Sometimes when a child/youth is exposed to one or more traumatic experiences over the course of their lives, they develop reactions that interfere with their daily lives. Children/youth may think about or relive a frightening event from their past. Certain places, objects, sounds, smells, words or people may act as trauma reminders or 'triggers'. Children can react to trauma differently depending on age, but not every child who experiences trauma will develop symptoms. Factors such as a child's age, development level and supportive resources can affect how a child experiences traumatic stress.

Indicators of concern for all ages may include:

- Experience depressive symptoms, feel scared and less secure
- Appear anxious, sad, angry, frightened or hyper vigilant or distracted
- Exhibit rebellious or risky behaviors
- Problems sleeping or night terrors
- Physical complaints
- Obsessive or hyper vigilant behavior
- Inability or hyper-ability to focus or concentrate

How to Support Children

- Maintain usual routines for meals, sleep, play, school
- Spend positive child-directed time together
- Be a good listener
- Be validating and reassuring



Ages:
Newborn to Infants

Developmental Causes for Concern

- Inconsolable crying or sadness
- Sensitivity to stimuli (touch, light, sound)
- Attachment difficulties
- Limited range of emotion and flat affect
- Failure to thrive

How to Support Children

- Consistently comfort crying and distress
- Develop a sense of security
- Be more responsive than usual
- Provide comfort items to promote self-regulation (pacifiers, stuffies, etc.)

Ages:
Toddlers to Pre-School

- Regularly cries or hard to soothe
- Overly fearful
- Reliving trauma during play
- Little or no reaction when familiar people enter or leave
- Returns to an earlier developmental level

- Provide a predictable environment by maintaining routines
- Reassure safety and belonging
- Be consistent about expectations
- Encourage them to play or talk about feelings and thoughts

Ages:
Pre-School to School Age

- Behavior problems at school
- Aggressive/hostile towards others
- Fearful with familiar adults or too friendly with strangers
- Returns to an earlier developmental level

- Encourage them to play or talk about feelings and thoughts
- Give simple and realistic answers to questions
- Set gentle but firm limits for 'acting out behavior'
- Decrease stimulating tv, movies, video games

Ages:
Pre-Adolescent to Pre-Adulthood

- Feels hopeless
- Withdrawn from friends and family
- Violent or abusive behavior
- Increased conflicts
- Difficulty managing emotions in a healthy way
- Use of alcohol or drugs

- Encourage them to discuss the trauma with a professional or someone they trust
- Answer questions directly
- Encourage participation in routine
- Set clear limits
- Address reckless behavior

