

Understanding Trauma

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SAFETY



Trauma is an experience or event that one believes is life threatening or harmful. This can be:

- Physical injury
- Witnessing a violent event
- Being in close proximity to danger
- Seeing or hearing others in a life threatening or harmful situation.

Specific examples of traumatic events include:

- Single trauma events
 - Accidents
 - Murders
 - Suicides
 - Assaults
 - Disasters
- Chronic trauma occurrence
 - Physical and sexual abuse
 - Domestic violence
 - War
 - Torture
- Traumatic loss events
 - Sudden separation from a sole caregiver
 - Sudden and unexpected deaths
 - Violent deaths
 - Death of a child

Anytime a child is removed from his or her home, it is traumatic. Additionally, that removal usually follows another traumatic event such as abuse, severe neglect, parental arrest, or even parental death.



Effects of Trauma According to Development Stage

Age	Developmental Stage	Developmental Impact of Trauma	Possible Behaviors as Result of Trauma
Prenatal Stressors and Substance Abuse and the Effects on Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical and neurological development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brain development deficits Decreased social-emotional interaction between infant and mother 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Born prematurely Health problems Learning problems later in life. Developmental delay May result in difficulty sustaining attention later in life May result in difficulty managing emotions later in life.
Infants and Toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop trust in world through needs being met consistently Develop a strong attachment to caregiver Increase self-confidence to develop psychologically and physically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of trust Potential attachment disorder Risk for mental health problems later in life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to soothe Difficulty sleeping Difficulty feeding Glossed-over eyes Hypersensitivity Although may not have the conscious memories, can have physical body-based memories which can become triggered, resulting in physical response May become more quickly dysregulated (shift activities abruptly)
Preschool Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain increasing independence Develop understanding of difference between self and others. Develop enjoyable separation from care givers and home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child sees self as bad May lead to depression, separation anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and conduct problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regressive behaviors (e.g. loss of bladder control, thumb sucking) Significant changes in eating habits Significant changes in sleeping habits Physical complaints of pain that have no medical basis Speech difficulties Irritability Fearful avoidance Appearing to be frozen Moving aimlessly Crying, whimpering, screaming Magical thinking related to trauma Repetitive reenactment of trauma themes in play

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Elementary School-Aged Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters complex gross and fine motor skills • Logical thinking develops • Peer group develops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social skills development delayed or hindered • Problem solving may be difficult • May have anxiety about leaving the home or safe places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical complaints of pain that have no medical basis • Social withdrawal • Attention seeking behaviors • Difficulty concentrating • School performance may decline • Irritability • Bedwetting • Eating difficulties • Nightmares and/or sleep disruption • Trauma themes in play/art/conversation • Sadness and crying
Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-identity is a central point • Development of personal values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social isolation • Difficulty defining values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance use • Promiscuous sexual behavior • Flashbacks • Nightmares • Avoidance of reminders of trauma • Depression • Suicidal thoughts • Difficulties with peer relationships • Delinquent behavior • Self-destructive behavior • Changes in school performance • Denial and detachment • Pseudomature actions (getting pregnant, leaving school, or getting married)
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate contribution to the world • Make your mark by being active in home life and the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicted over making new attachments. • Changes in self-perception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation • Difficulties regulating emotions • Chronic and pervasive sense of helplessness, shame, guilt, and sense of being different from others. • Repeated search for a rescuer • Somatization

Minimizing Trauma

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Trauma Triggers

Just as memories can be triggered by a certain smell or sound, traumatic events can be triggered by sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell. Thus, when working with children who have been traumatized it is important to try to minimize any trauma associated with the law enforcement.

How to React to a Child who has been Traumatized

When working with children who have been traumatized provide them with accurate information regarding the situation and address their concerns and worries. Remember that a child who has been traumatized may have a lower developmental level than their age. It is inappropriate to make light of the situation and to make jokes about what has happened.

Tips for Talking with Children

- Introduce yourself with your first name
- Use the child's name
- Use simple, age-appropriate language
- Sit at the child's physical eye level
- Explain your role as a police officer is to keep the child safe
- Acknowledge the child's right to remain silent
- Recognize the child's loyalty to the parent
- Don't criticize the parent(s)
- Answer any questions that the child may have
- Ask one question at a time
- Avoid "why" questions
- Ensure that the child understands the question
- Ask open-ended questions and use simple reflection to make sure there is clarity
- Make no assumptions about the child's abilities based on age
- Allow the child to hold onto a stuffed animal or other object for comfort
- Avoid rushing the child; let them have time to process thoughts and feelings
- Observe non-verbal communication
- Do not make promises that you will not be able to fulfill