

# TRAUMA IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



## WHAT IS TRAUMA?

A trauma can be defined as a wound that overwhelms the sufferer's ability to endure the emotional and physical pain. At any age, we can experience stressful or distressing events that overwhelm us emotionally and physically, and this can be referred to as experiencing trauma.

People react in different ways to stressful or distressing events. This reaction might be immediately or sometime after. Depending on a range of factors, some of which are described below, trauma can be devastating and cause long-lasting harm, e.g., PTSD, Relational/Developmental trauma.

## TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Traumatic events can range in severity and frequency.

Individuals can be traumatised by an event that others may not perceive as traumatic. e.g., loss or change of main care giver, hospital treatments that may be painful or frightening, frightening situation to a child or young person that an adult might not find frightening.

## POTENTIAL TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

Examples may be:

- Abuse i.e., physical, sexual, racial, and domestic
- Parental Drug/Alcohol abuse and/ or Mental Illness
- Emotional and /or Physical Neglect
- Change or Loss i.e., Death of a loved one or relationship changes.
- Bullying
- Major Events i.e., Fires or Accidents.

It is **IMPORTANT** to understand that a Child or Young Person can be traumatised if they witness harm/abuse of others.

## ATTACHMENT

Children and Young People's early experiences of attachment to their main care giver can affect their reaction to a stressful or traumatic event. If a Child or Young Person has had stable/secure relationships in their early life this can mean they might be more resilient to effects of trauma.

## RELATIONAL TRAUMA

However, if a Child or Young Person experiences unstable/insecure relationships in their early life they can be more vulnerable to experiencing a significant impact from traumatic event. These kinds of early experiences can lead to relational trauma and loss. E.g., a Child or Young Person who are in care or has been adopted may have experienced 5 or 6 relational traumas/losses in their early life. Even if they are now in a stable home environment the level of pain, they experience can be significant and is often buried under the surface.

## HOW MIGHT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BE AFFECTED BY TRAUMA

Traumatic events can affect emotions, behaviour, brain development, mental health, cognition, relationships, behaviour, physical health.

Each Child and Young Person will be affected in different ways depending on the circumstances of the traumatic event/events. Not all Children and Young People will experience a severe and/or enduring impact of traumatic event. The following list details some of the effects of traumatic events on Children and Young People.

### EMOTIONS

- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Shame and guilt
- Anxious, excessive worry
- Difficulty knowing what they are feeling
- Unsafe, Frightened
- Abandoned, lonely
- Powerless
- Sensitive to stress

### BEHAVIOUR

- Difficulty with self-regulation
- Social withdrawal
- Aggression
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Increased risk of drug/alcohol misuse



# WHEN WILL MY CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON FEEL BETTER?

This can depend on factors like the kind of traumatic event or how often/ long trauma went on for.

## REMEMBER!



“Trauma creates change you do not choose. Healing creates change you do choose.”

– Michele Rosenthal.



## HOW OUR BRAIN AND BODIES REACT TO TRAUMA/STRESS

### THE FLIGHT, FIGHT, FLOP AND FREEZE RESPONSE

When people are feeling threatened or scared, our brains and bodies respond by trying to protect us. One way our brain helps protect us is by sending a signal to our body to produce chemicals such as, Adrenaline. Adrenaline can help us by giving us energy to either run away or confront a scary/stressful situation.

Consider this example. We are face to face with a wild animal, e.g., a Tiger.

How Might someone React?

- Run Away
- Back away Slowly
- Fight the Tiger
- Our Body may Freeze
- Faint

All of these reactions are how our brains attempt to protect our mind and body from scary or stressful situations. However, depending on our response and the situation, we can still experience harm despite our reaction.

Additionally, while chemicals like adrenaline are designed to protect us from harm, they can affect our brains and bodies. Often people can feel exhausted after a stressful or traumatic event as these periods use up a lot of energy.

This often referred to as a ‘Fight or Flight’ response. In a traumatic event, the fight or flight process is something out with our control and is automatic.

Depending on where we live, it may be rare to come across a situation where we are face to face with a Tiger. However, as mentioned under the section Traumatic Events, there are other stressful or frightening events where our brains and bodies will react in a similar way.

## EFFECTS/IMPACT OF TRAUMA

### PHYSICAL

- Sensitive flight, fight, freeze, flop response
- Brain development
- Difficulty sleeping
- Impact on immune system
- Eating disorders

### MENTAL HEALTH

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem/self-perception
- Suicidality
- PTSD

### RELATIONSHIPS

- Attachment problems
- Difficulties with peer relationships
- Difficulty understanding social interactions

### BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- Smaller brain size (early relational trauma)
- Stress response impaired

### COGNITION

- Concentration problems
- Difficulties with learning
- Difficulties with problem solving
- Language delays

## SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW!

The information in this leaflet is just a taster of the information, support and advice, The Miracle Foundation can provide for you and your Child or Young Person.

If you would like to find out more or want to get in touch with our organisation, feel free to use your mobile to SCAN the QR code provided to direct you to our organisation’s website.



THE MIRACLE  
FOUNDATION  
SCIO

## HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD IF THEY'VE EXPERIENCED A TRAUMA?

- 1. ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF SAFETY AND COMFORT** Developing this might involve a variety of factors including; consistent daily routines where possible, provide a safe, nurturing, and comforting relationship/environment. It is important that affection, particularly physical affection e.g., hugs, is appropriate and is considered in context of traumatic event. For some Children and Young People who have experienced sexual/physical abuse, physical affection may not feel safe or be wanted. It may be useful to be guided by Children and Young People and if they have indicated they would like affection.
- 2. SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO SELF-REGULATE** if needed.
- 3. DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING OF TRAUMATIC EVENT/EVENTS AND IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE** The more empathy adults can develop about Children and Young People experiences will mean they are more prepared to support Children and Young People.
- 4. SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND TRAUMATIC EVENT/EVENTS** and their responses to experience.
- 5. TALKING ABOUT THE TRAUMATIC EVENT** It can be useful to be guided by the Child or Young Person and if they want to talk about it. If a Child or Young Person asks about an event do not avoid it. Try to be calm, listen to them, provide comfort and support. Use clear and age-appropriate language. Try to answer their questions even if you're not sure what to say. It is ok not to know why the event happened and you might be upset or confused about it. If however, a Child or Young Person does not bring it up do not mention it. Also consider when an event happened as if it was very recent the Child or Young Person will not have been able to process experience.
- 6. TALKING TO OTHERS ABOUT TRAUMATIC EVENT**  
If the Child or Young Person has given permission, it can be helpful if other people in CYP life have some awareness about what CYP has experienced so they can learn to understand, empathise, and support if needed. E.g., teachers. If people are not familiar with impact of trauma you may need to educate them.
- 7. ASK FOR HELP** e.g., professional, if effects/impact of trauma worsens/persists or affects functioning significantly.
- 8. CLARIFY AND AMEND CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON'S UNDERSTANDING OF EVENT/EVENTS**  
Young children particularly may have or develop a distorted perception of event including cause. This can affect how they think, feel and behave. They might make connections about things that have no relation to event and blame themselves E.g., my sister died because I was horrible to her.
- 9. USE POSITIVE DISCIPLINE PRINCIPALS** establish clear rules, discuss them with CYP and aim to find solutions for any misbehaviours, think about and aim to understand what the Child or Young Person might be communicating with their behaviour, connection before correction, use encouragement rather than praise or punishment.
- 10. PROTECT THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON** and be aware of any potential triggers of traumatic event or effects. You may need to help the Child or Young Person stop any activities that may be upsetting /retraumatising them.
- 11. PROVIDE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH APPROPRIATE DEGREE OF CONTROL AND CHOICES** If a Child or Young Person who has been traumatised feels like they have little or no control of a situation they might react with behaviours related to trauma.
- 12. ENCOURAGE/SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEARN COPING STRATEGIES /CARE FOR THEMSELVES** e.g., relaxation/mindfulness, exercise, getting enough sleep, more examples in CYP leaflet.

## USEFUL LINKS



Stress on the Brain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhI9KLwfpbM>



Online article about free Mindfulness Apps: <https://www.mindful.org/free-mindfulness-apps-worthy-of-your-attention/>



Parent Leaflet: lots of information and resources about trauma: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/?section=welcome-to-beacon-house>



## SELF-CARE

Self-care is extremely important. It is all about taking time out to look after yourself and your child or young person.

Taking care of yourself mentally and physically can be beneficial by identifying some distractions from emotions you are feeling.

Some examples for all the family could be:

- Going for a Walk
- Listening to a Podcast or Music
- Cooking or Baking
- Sketching
- Painting
- Meditation/ Yoga
- Reading a Book
- Taking a Nap



**CAN YOU THINK OF ANYMORE?**

The Miracle Foundation SCIO are a bereavement and trauma organisation for Children and Young People between the age of 4 and 18 years old.

We have a great team of counsellors and art therapists that can help you deal with the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing. We will help you develop healthy techniques to deal with your emotions, build on your emotional strength and provide you with a hope for the future. We are here to support and help you when you are struggling during difficult times.

**IF YOU NEED HELP/SUPPORT STRAIGHT AWAY, YOU CAN CALL 999 OR GO STRAIGHT TO MY NEAREST ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY DEPT IF YOU CAN GET THERE SAFELY.**



## REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT!

It is important to remember you are not alone. Why not try reaching out to a trusted friend, family member or adult?

Timely effective mental health interventions may help your Child by; increasing your Child's feelings of safety, a sense of control over own feelings, teaching emotional management, particularly when faced with trauma triggers.

The Miracle Foundation specialise in Bereavement and Trauma Support for Children and Young People. You can contact us directly on 01698 760479.

### USEFUL CONTACTS

If someone is at risk of coming to harm, the services would need to get in touch with emergency services or appropriate authorities.

### CHILDLINE

A confidential service, operating times can be found on the website.

**TEL: 0800 1111**

**ONLINE COUNSELLING: 1-2-1 chat**

### SHOUT

A free confidential and anonymous service available 24/7.

**TEXT: 85258**

### SAMARITANS

Whatever you are going through, Samaritans can be called any time, from any phone for free.

**TEL: 116 123**

### BREATHING SPACE

A free, confidential, phone service for anyone in Scotland over the age of 16 experiencing low mood, depression, or anxiety.

**TEL: 0800838587**



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