

***Caring for Children Who
Have Experienced
Trauma***



Introduction

Why a Trauma Workshop?

- Many children in foster care have lived through traumatic experiences.
- Trauma affects a child's behavior, feelings, relationships, and view of the world in profound ways.

The Challenge:

Caring for children who have been through trauma can leave adults feeling:

- Confused
- Frustrated
- Unappreciated
- Angry
- Helpless

**The Solution:
Trauma-Informed Care**

When you understand what trauma is and how it has affected the children in our care, it becomes easier to:

- Communicate more effectively
- Improve the child's behavior and attitudes
- Get the child the help he or she needs
- Reduce the risk of your own compassion fatigue or secondary traumatization
- Become more effective in our work

**The Essential Elements of
Trauma-Informed Parenting**

1. Recognize the impact trauma has had on children in our care.
2. Help your child to feel safe.
3. Help your child to understand and manage overwhelming emotions.
4. Help your child to understand and modify problem behaviors.
5. Respect and support positive, stable, and enduring relationships in the life of your child.

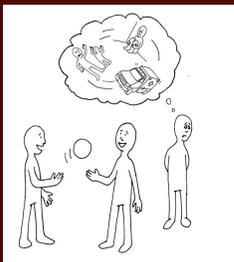
*Adapted from "The essential elements of trauma-informed child welfare practice" from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit.

The Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Parenting

6. Help your child to develop a strength-based understanding of his or her life story.
7. Be an advocate for your child.
8. Promote and support trauma-focused assessment and treatment for your child.
9. Take care of yourself.

Myths to Avoid

- The care I provide should be enough to erase the effects of everything bad that happened before.
- These children should be grateful and appreciate everything I do for them.
- These children shouldn't love or feel loyal to an abusive parent.
- It's better to just move on, forget, and not talk about past painful experiences.



Understanding Trauma's Effects

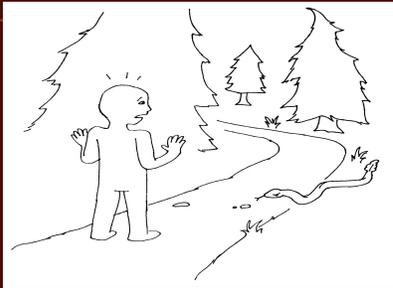
Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

Essential Element 1

1. Recognize the impact trauma has had on your child.

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We Learn by Experience

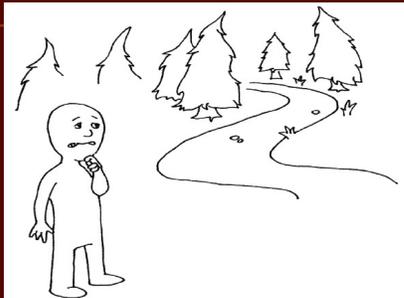


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We Learn by Experience

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Your Internal Alarm System

The brain releases chemicals that help the body to respond to the threat (fight, flight, freeze)

If the threat is removed, everything returns to normal

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Your Internal Alarm System

The brain releases chemicals that help the body to respond to the threat (fight, flight, freeze)

If the threat continues or is repeated, the system stays on "red alert"

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Experience Grows the Brain

- Brain development happens from the bottom up:
 - From primitive (basic survival)
 - To more complex (rational thought, planning, abstract thinking)

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Experience Grows the Brain

- The brain develops by forming connections.
- Interactions with caregivers are critical to brain development.
- The more an experience is repeated, the stronger the connections become.



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Trauma Interferes with Development

Exposure to trauma causes the brain to develop in a way that will help the child survive in a dangerous world:

- On constant alert for danger
- Quick to react to threats (fight, flight, freeze)

The stress hormones produced during trauma also interfere with the development of higher brain functions.

Source: Telcher, M. H. (2002). Scars that won't heal: The neurobiology of child abuse. *Scientific American*, 286 (3), 68-75.

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Young Children (0-5)

Developmental Tasks

- Development of visual and auditory perception
- Recognition of and response to emotional cues
- Attachment to primary caregiver

Trauma's Impact

- Sensitivity to noise
- Avoidance of contact
- Heightened startle response
- Confusion about what's dangerous and who to go to for protection
- Fear of being separated from familiar people/places

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School-Aged Children (6–12)

Developmental Tasks

- Manage fears, anxieties, and aggression
- Sustain attention for learning and problem solving
- Control impulses and manage physical responses to danger

Trauma's Impact

- Emotional swings
- Learning problems
- Specific anxieties and fears
- Attention seeking
- Reversion to younger behaviors

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Adolescents (13–21)

Developmental Tasks

- Think abstractly
- Accurately judge danger and safety
- Modify and control behavior to meet long-term goals
- Anticipate and consider the consequences of behavior

Trauma's Impact

- Difficulty imagining or planning for the future
- Over- or underestimating danger
- Inappropriate aggression
- Reckless and/or self-destructive behaviors

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Getting Development Back on Track

- Traumatized children and adolescents can learn new ways of thinking, relating, and responding.
- Rational thought and self-awareness can help children override primitive brain responses.
- Unlearning—and rebuilding—takes time.

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A traumatic experience . . .

- Threatens the life or physical integrity of a child or of someone important to that child (parent, grandparent, sibling)
- Causes an overwhelming sense of terror, helplessness, and horror
- Produces intense physical effects such as pounding heart, rapid breathing, trembling, dizziness, or loss of bladder or bowel control

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How Children Respond to Trauma

Long-term trauma can interfere with healthy development and affect a child's:

- Ability to trust others
- Sense of personal safety
- Ability to manage emotions
- Ability to navigate and adjust to life's changes
- Physical and emotional responses to stress

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How Children Respond to Trauma

A child's reactions to trauma will vary depending on:

- Age and developmental stage
- Temperament
- Perception of the danger faced
- Trauma history (cumulative effects)
- Adversities faced following the trauma
- Availability of adults who can offer help, reassurance, and protection

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How Children Respond to Trauma



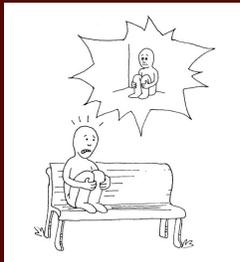
Hyperarousal:

- Nervousness
- Jumpiness
- Quickness to startle

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How Children Respond to Trauma



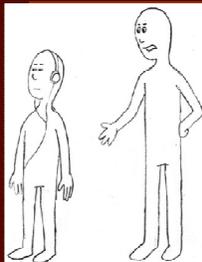
Reexperiencing:

- Intrusive images, sensations, dreams
- Intrusive memories of the traumatic event or events

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How Children Respond to Trauma

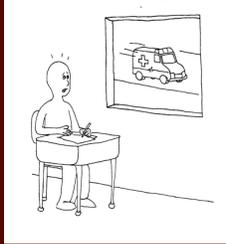


Avoidance and withdrawal:

- Feeling numb, shut down, or separated from normal life
- Pulling away from activities and relationships
- Avoiding things that prompt memories of the trauma

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**What You Might See:
Reactions to Trauma Reminders**



Trauma reminders:

Things, events, situations, places, sensations, and even people that a child connects with a traumatic event

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**What You Might See:
Traumatic Stress Reactions**

- Problems concentrating, learning, or taking in new information
- Difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep, nightmares
- Emotional instability; moody, sad, or angry and aggressive, etc.
- Age-inappropriate behaviors; reacting like a much younger child

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**What You Might See:
Traumatic Play**

When playing, children and adolescents who have been through traumatic events may:

- Repeat all or part of the traumatic event
- Take on the role of the abuser
- Try out different outcomes
- Get “stuck” on a particular moment or event

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**What You Might See:
Talking About Trauma**

- Talking about certain events all the time
- Bringing up the topic seemingly “out of the blue”
- Being confused or mistaken about details
- Remembering only fragments of what happened
- Avoiding talk about anything remotely related to the traumatic events

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**Recovering from Trauma:
The Role of Resilience**

- Resilience is the ability to recover from traumatic events.
- Children who are resilient see themselves as:
 - Safe
 - Capable
 - Lovable

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Just as despair can come to one only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings.

—Elie Wiesel
Author, activist,
and Holocaust survivor

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Growing Resilience

Factors that can increase resilience include:

- A strong relationship with at least one competent, caring adult
- Feeling connected to a positive role model/mentor
- Having talents/abilities nurtured and appreciated
- Feeling some control over one's own life
- Having a sense of belonging to a community, group, or cause larger than oneself

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Recognizing Resilience: My Child

- What strengths or talents can you encourage?
- What people have served as role models?
- What people have served as sources of strength or comfort?
- What does your child see as being within his or her control?
- What causes larger than him- or herself could your child participate in?

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What Trauma-Informed Caregivers Can Do

- Offer a secure base of caring and safety.
- Be emotionally and physically available.
- Recognize and respond to the child's needs.
- Provide guidance and example.
- Provide opportunities to safely explore the world.

Source: Better Brains for Babies. (2007). *Attachments and the role of the caregiver*. Available at <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/bbb/attachCareGiver.php>

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What Trauma-Informed Parenting Can Do

- When we protect them from harm. . .
 - . . . children learn that the world is safe.
- When we support, nurture, and respond to them. . .
 - . . . children learn that they are capable.
- When we give them affection and love . . .
 - . . . children learn that they are lovable.

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