

Screening for Trauma in Community Settings



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Goals of this Presentation:

- What is trauma and how common is it?

What are signs of trauma at different ages?

- How can providers (e.g., teachers, doctors & health care workers) help to identify those who are experiencing traumatic stress symptoms?
- What are simple screening questions to identify those who should be referred for trauma-focused treatment?
- Messages that are helpful vs. unhelpful to hear in the wake of trauma

Childhood Trauma

Up to 67% of youth in US have experienced at least 1 traumatic event during childhood

Multiple types of trauma is common

Children who experience trauma at significant risk of developing mental health problems, school and social difficulties, physical illness

Children often do not disclose these events



Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009; Kilpatrick, Saunders, & Resnick, 1998; [Info at: www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

Why is Screening in Community Settings Important?

Children's functioning is significantly affected by trauma, and many children & families remain silent about traumatic events until they are asked

Teachers, doctors, and health professionals are important sources of support and guidance

Children or parents may need or want to talk with *you*

Families may be more likely to accept help or referrals from professionals they know and trust



What is Trauma?

Trauma is an emotional or physical reaction to an event that is witnessed or experienced as deeply disturbing.

Types of traumatic events include:

Being a victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse

Witnessing family or community violence

Loss of a relative or friend due to accident, illness, disease, natural disaster, or violence

Involvement in an accident or natural disaster

Impact of Trauma

- Only a portion of individuals who experience a traumatic event will go on to develop post-traumatic stress symptoms
- Impact varies and typically includes:
 - Emotional, Behavioral, and Cognitive aspects
- Child abuse and trauma is a general risk factor for developing adult mental health and substance abuse problems

What is Traumatic Stress?

Undergoing something terrifying and having reactions that keep you from moving forward in a typical way

Signs include:

Intrusive thoughts or re-experiencing

(e.g., nightmares, flashbacks)

Avoidance or numbing

(e.g., avoiding thinking about the event, forgetting, feeling numb)

Increased arousal

(e.g., irritability, difficulty sleeping)



Other Emotional Symptoms

Fear

Sadness

Anger

Anxiety

Depression

Emotion Dysregulation

Physiological arousal

Emotional distress

Difficulty self-soothing



What is Traumatic Grief?

- Losing a loved one under traumatic circumstances
- Developing PTS symptoms that interfere with the ability to progress normally because they are “stuck” on the traumatic aspects of the death
 - Avoiding all memories of loved one
 - Increase in aggressive behavior
 - Re-enactment of traumatic death

Consequences of Trauma and Traumatic Grief



Traumatic stress can affect:

Ability to concentrate, learn, and perform well in school

Relationships with peers, adults, community

Functioning of the entire family

How individuals view the world and the future

Expectations for safety and security

Reactions to Trauma and Loss

Trauma experienced differently
depending on:

Victim's age and level of development

How the family and community responds
& reacts

Cultural background/beliefs

Individual reactions to trauma vary:

Some will show symptoms immediately,
while others will take longer to react

Some will show distress for a short time, in
bursts that come and go



How do Preschool Children React?

Feelings of helplessness and generalized anxiety

Difficulty expressing what is bothering them

Loss of previously acquired skills

Increased attachment needs

Need to “play out” traumatic event

Sleep and eating problems



How do School-Age Children React?

Persistent concerns over safety

Constant retelling of traumatic event

Feelings of guilt or shame

Overwhelming fear or sadness

Aggression, irritability

Diminished attention, memory

Psychosomatic (body) complaints

Avoiding social activities

Sleep problems



How do Adolescents React?

Self-consciousness about emotional responses

Concern over being labeled “abnormal”

Withdrawal from family and friends

Feelings of shame and guilt

Fantasies of revenge and retribution

Radical shift in perceptions of the world

‘Pretend it didn’t happen’

Self-destructive behavior

Diminished attention, memory



What You Can Do to Help...

Asking simple screening questions about traumatic events communicates that you would like to help

Reassure that you and other people will do everything you can to keep them safe...And follow through

Be a good listener

Give simple and realistic answers to their questions

Show that the community supports and accepts survivors of trauma

Encourage them to discuss the traumatic event or their behavior with a professional or someone they trust

Screening for Trauma

Who should screen for trauma?

Teachers and school personnel

Doctors and other health/or mental health providers

Other youth service agencies

How can doctors' offices, schools, and other community agencies who serve children & families screen for trauma in sensitive, brief and effective ways?

Educate yourself about the signs & symptoms!

Informal observations & formal screening questions



Child Stress Disorder Checklist – Screening Form (CSDC-SF)

Developed by Glenn Saxe, M.D. & Michelle Bosquet, Ph. D.
and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network

***Ages 2-18**

Has your child experienced or witnessed an event that caused, or threatened to cause, serious harm to him/herself or to someone else? Check any and all events and age(s) of your child at the time of the event(s):

1) Car Accident

5) Physical Illness

3) Fire

7) Sexual Assault

Child Stress Disorder Checklist – Screening Form (Continued)

Directions: Rate each item that describes your child now or within the past month according to this scale:

[0 = Not true; 1 = Somewhat/sometimes true; 2 = Often/very true]

- 1) Child gets very upset if reminded of the event.
- 2) Child reports more physical complaints when reminded of the event (headaches, stomachaches, nausea, trouble breathing).
- 3) Child reports that he/she does not want to talk about the event.
- 4) Child startles easily. For example, he/she jumps when hears sudden or loud noises.

Creating a Supportive Environment

- Screening helps identify children/families in need of resources & referrals
- Build relationships
 - Listen – You don't have to be a counselor to help!
Support children
 - Support families



Things People Heard That Helped

“I’m ready to listen when you’re ready to talk.”

"I can't know how you feel, but I want to help you in any way that I can."

“I know that you are sad.

It's OK to cry."

“I'm sorry that ____ died."



Things People Heard that Helped

"It's okay to feel scared. I'm here if you want to talk and I'll try to help you feel better."

"A lot has happened. Is there anything you're worried about or that I can help you better understand?"

"I will be here when you want to talk about what happened. It might help you to talk about it with somebody when you are ready. If you would rather talk to a counselor, I will find one for you to talk to."

Things People Heard that *Didn't* Help

“I know how you feel.”

“It's been four months now, you should be over it.”

“You'll get over it in time. Just try not to think about it.”

“Just concentrate on what you have left.”

“You shouldn't be this angry. Being angry won't bring your brother back.”

Resources



National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): www.nctsn.org

Request a free version of the [Child Stress Disorder Checklist – Screening Form \(CSDC-SF\)](#)

Early Childhood Trauma Resources through SAMHSA:
http://www.samhsa.gov/children/earlychildhood_trauma_resources.asp

Consortium on Trauma, Illness & Grief in Schools:
<http://www.tigconsortium.org/>

Indian Country Child Trauma Center: www.icctc.org

Brochure for parents on child trauma:
<http://www.icctc.org/what%20is%20trauma-revised.pdf>

New Mexico Child Abuse Prevention Partnership (NM-CAPP):
<http://nmcapp.unm.edu/>