

# The impact of trauma on children and young people

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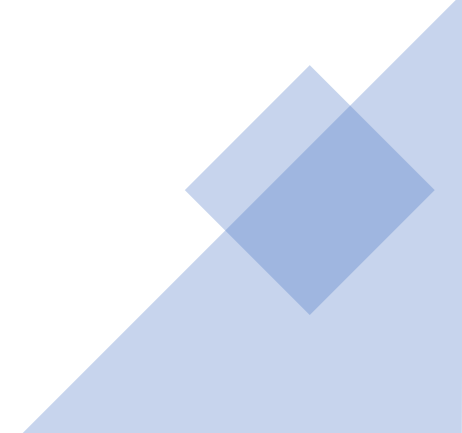
# Before we start...

- This is a sensitive topic
- Many of us have been exposed to trauma either directly or vicariously
- Please feel free to take care of yourselves in whatever way you need to during this session
- Talk things through with a trusted friend or professional if you feel unsettled, upset or worried after this session





# Overview of today's session

- What is trauma?
  - Common reactions to trauma
  - What is PTSD?
  - Risk and protective factors
  - Potential impact of trauma on development
  - Post traumatic growth
  - How can you help your child?
  - Resources
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# What is trauma?


- The American Psychological Association defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event”
- Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years)

Let's discuss...

- What sort of events or experiences might result in trauma?
- Can two people be affected differently by the same event?



# Common reactions to trauma in children

- Nightmares and other sleep difficulties
  - Intrusive memories or images
  - Playing or drawing about the event over and over
  - Not wanting to think or talk about it
  - Avoiding things that remind them of it
  - Getting angry, upset or scared more easily
  - Not being able to concentrate
  - Being jumpy or alert and more clingy to parents/carers
  - Getting more stomach/headaches
  - Other changes in mood or behaviour at home/school
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# What is PTSD?

= Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Can affect anyone who has been exposed to a traumatic event
- Only affects some people exposed to trauma (about 16% of children)
- It is normal to experience difficulties after a trauma but would expect these to get better over time
- If difficulties are not getting better after a month, this might indicate PTSD

# What is PTSD?

## DSM-V CRITERIA:

- Exposed to threatened death/serious injury/sexual violence and:
  1. Experiencing intrusions (i.e. intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks, intense distress when reminded of trauma)
  2. Avoiding reminders of event (external or internal)
  3. Having negative thoughts and feelings related to event
  4. Experiencing hypervigilance and hyperarousal (e.g. irritability, sleep problems, exaggerated startle response)
- Symptoms have lasted more than a month since exposure to trauma
- Symptoms are causing distress

# Risk Factors

- The event involved high risk of death or significant harm
- Female
- Existing mental health difficulty (e.g. anxiety or depression)
- Lack of family support or poor family functioning
- Parent/carer has strong trauma reaction/PTSD
- Poor social support, e.g. from school/community
- Coping by social withdrawal and avoidance

# Protective Factors


- Family support
- Social support
- Higher intelligence
- The opportunity to talk things through and understand what has happened
- Good mental health, including positive beliefs about self, others and the world
- Emotional intelligence
- Positive coping strategies, e.g. accessing support, good emotional regulation skills





# How does trauma impact on child development?

The answer to this question depends on lots of factors:

- The type of trauma(s)
  - The age of the child
  - The family/environment they are living in
  - All the other risk/protective factors we discussed previously
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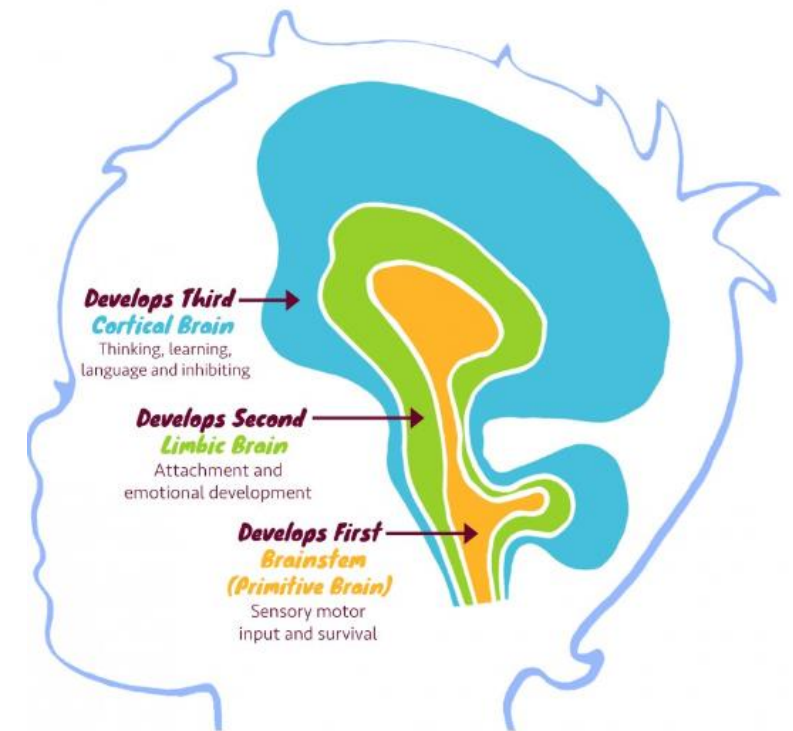
# A bit about how the brain responds to threat

- Brain prioritises survival over everything else – if our brain spots threat, triggers survival response – fight/flight/freeze/fawn
- Trauma memories are fragmented so even innocuous things that were present at time of trauma can now trigger sense of threat (e.g. a colour, smell, facial expression etc.)
- Understandable reaction to trauma – not ‘mad’
- Smoke alarm analogy – don’t want to get rid of the smoke alarm as we need it to protect us from fire but do want to readjust it so it stops going off every time we make toast



# A bit about brain development

- Brain develops fastest in first years of life but keeps developing until 40s+
- When born, higher human functions are not yet online (e.g. emotional/social intelligence) and the focus is on survival
- Our early life experiences affect which connections are made
- The more often a connection is used, the stronger it gets - a regularly soothed baby will have better developed calm and wellbeing systems



Children's brains develop  
from the bottom up.



# Group discussion

What happens if a child is regularly exposed to trauma?

- How might it affect their beliefs about themselves, others and the world?
- How might it affect their relationships with others?
- How might it affect their physical health?
- How might it affect their cognitive functioning?
- What coping strategies might they develop?

[Childhood Trauma and the Brain - UKTC \(uktraumacouncil.org\)](http://uktraumacouncil.org)



# Post traumatic growth

= positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with trauma

- New possibilities
- Relating to others
- Personal strength
- Spiritual change
- Appreciation of life



# How can you help your child?

- Make home feel safe – unconditional love and warmth; regular opportunities for play & connection; routines; consistent rules & logical consequences
- Help your child to understand what has happened – be available to talk to; answer questions truthfully; help clarify misunderstandings; use play/drawing; go at your child's pace
- Let them know what they are feeling is normal and understandable
- Ensure other people in your child's life understand too, e.g. school, extended family
- Look after yourself as well – seek your own support; maintain your physical health (diet, sleep, exercise); meaningful activity etc. etc.
- Seek support from professionals if you are worried, e.g. GP, CAMHS, Yellow Door, No Limits



what we see  
thoughts  
feelings  
what lies beneath

ACEs trauma  
"It must be hard."  
"You find them/it..."  
"I can understand how upset you are"

Listen until they **STOP**

animated not agitated x

# empathy

how they feel  
how you feel

**OPEN**

snap

match tone  
£ = pace  
intensity

"I wonder..."  
"Tell me about that"  
"What do you want / think / feel..."

prepare to be influenced ↻



nibbles and bubbles.co.uk  
@emmaignation

# P.A.C.E.

yourself



# curiosity

Their world  
Your world

GO DEEP  
The Well of Understanding  
THEIR TRUTH

"Oops - I got that wrong, sorry"  
"Can I join in?"  
"Let's skip / dance go crazy"

play heals

don't sweat the small stuff



connection NOT connection

# acceptance

help them reflect

all behaviour is communication

you are safe

"You are okay that behaviour is not"  
"I can see why you might think that"

suspend judgement

**OPEN MIND**

unconditional positive regard



# Further resources

Yellow Door – <https://yellowdoor.org.uk>

No Limits – <https://nolimitshelp.org.uk>

David Trickey's trauma resources – <https://davidtrickey.com/resources>

Childhood Trauma Recovery Network UK – <https://www.traumarecoverynetworkuk.org>

UK Trauma Council – <https://uktraumacouncil.org>



# And now for you...

This has been a heavy topic to discuss together.

How are you going to fill your cup?

