



## TRAUMA 101

*Material adapted from NCTSN's "Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma, A Workshop for Resource Parents"*

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# Trauma 101



# 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

# What is Child Trauma?



- Witnessing or experiencing an event that poses a real or perceived threat
- The event overwhelms the child's ability to cope
- Kids do NOT cope like adults with trauma!

# Types of Trauma

## **Acute Trauma**

A single event that lasts for a limited time

## **Chronic trauma**

The experience of multiple traumatic events, often over a long period of time

## **Complex Trauma**

- Multiple traumatic events that continue over time and may begin at any age.
- Usually caused by adults who had responsibility to care for and protect-the child

# Types of Trauma



## **Historical Trauma:**

A personal or historical event or prolonged experience that continues to have an impact over several generations

## **Medical Trauma:**

Ongoing or chronic illness, medical exams, medical treatments, or procedures

## **System-related Trauma:**

Multiple placements, experiences in detention, or residential settings, incarcerated parent or caregiver

<http://www.aecf.org/resources/a-shared-sentence/>

# What About Neglect?



- Failure to provide for a child's basic needs
- Perceived as trauma by an infant or young child completely dependent on adults for care
- Opens the door to other traumatic events
- May reduce a child's ability to recover from trauma <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/06/neglect.aspx>

# Our Children's Trauma's...



- Acute
- Chronic
- Complex
- Historical
- Medical
- System related
- Neglect
- What don't I know?





# How Children Respond to Trauma



- With their trust in others
- In their sense of personal safety
- In their ability to manage emotions
- In their ability to navigate and adjust to life's changes
- In their overall physical and emotional responses to stress (flight, fight, freeze)

# 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

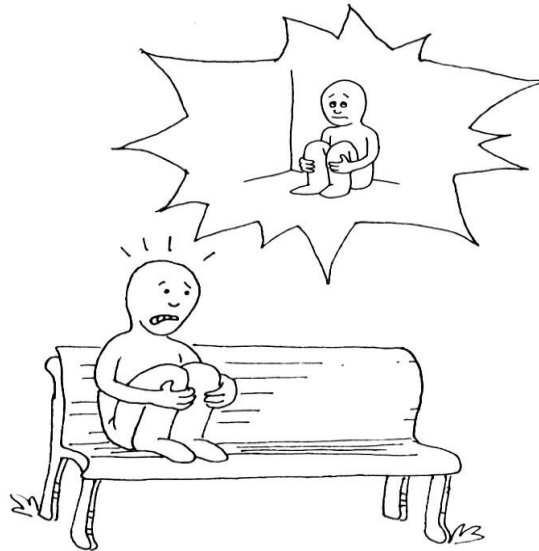
# Hyper-arousal

- Nervousness
- Jumpiness
- Quickness to startle



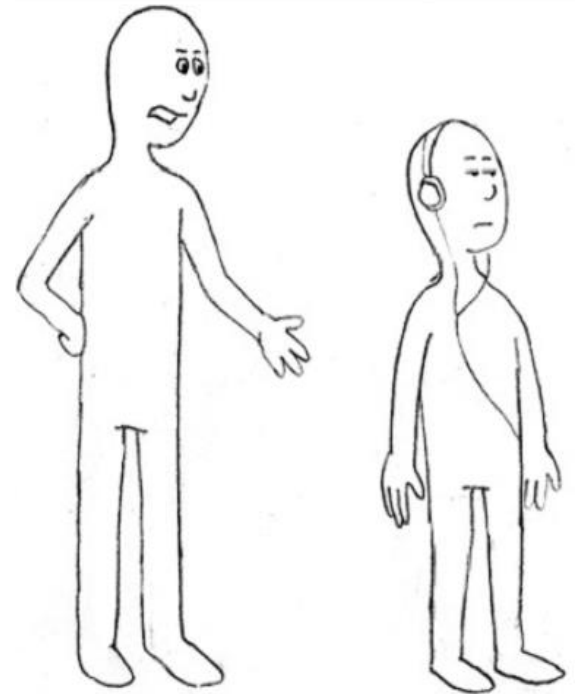
# Re-experiencing Trauma

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



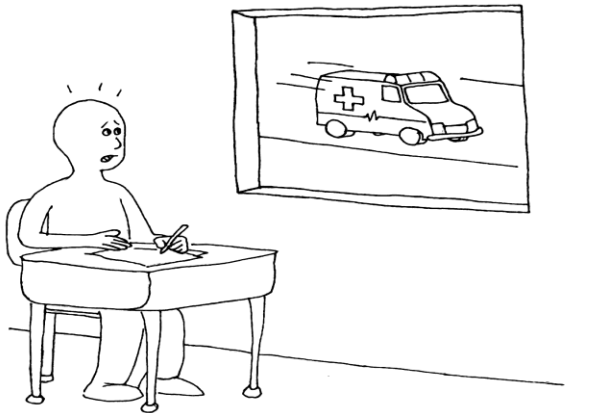
# Avoidance and withdrawal

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



# Trauma Reminders

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



May result in:

- Re-experiencing
- Withdrawal
- Disassociation

*I don't think there was a time when I wasn't abused as a child. In order to survive the abuse, I made believe that the real me was separate from my body. That way, the abuse was happening not really to me, but just this skin I'm in. – C.M.*

My body betrayed me. *Represent*. Sept/Oct. 2003.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/SeptOct2003/FCYU-2003-09-24.htm>

# 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



# Traumatic Play



- 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

# Traumatic Play

Seek professional help if your child:

- Centers most play activities around traumatic events
- Becomes very upset during traumatic play
- Repeatedly plays the role of the abuser with dolls or stuffed animals or acts out abuse with other children
- Plays in a way that interferes with relationships with other children

# 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

# Our Children's Response to Trauma

- Hyper-arousal?
- Withdrawal?
- Re-experiencing?
- Reacting like a much younger child?
- Reactions to trauma reminders?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?  
v=Itun92DfnPY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Itun92DfnPY)

# Recovering from Trauma The Role of Resilience



What goes right in childhood predicts the future far better than what goes wrong.

-George Vaillant

Not all children and youth who experience traumatic events develop symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

# Resilience



Resilience is the ability to recover from traumatic events.

Children who are resilient see themselves as:

- Safe
- Capable
- Lovable



# Growing Resilience



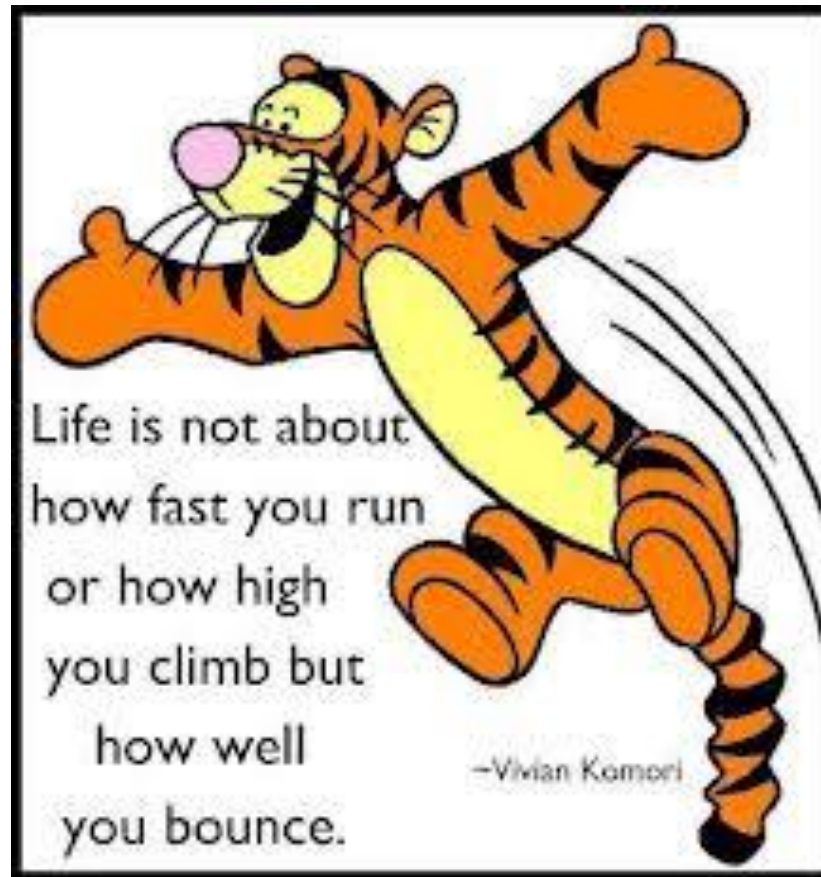
Factors that can increase resilience include:

- 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

# Recognizing Resilience: Our Children



- 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?



# Questions?