

Understanding Child Trauma



It's important to recognize the signs of traumatic stress and its short- and long-term impact.

The signs of traumatic stress may be different in each child. Young children may react differently than older children.



PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

- Fear being separated from their parent/caregiver
- Cry or scream a lot
- Eat poorly or lose weight
- Have nightmares



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

- Become anxious or fearful
- Feel guilt or shame
- Have a hard time concentrating
- Have difficulty sleeping



MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL CHILDREN

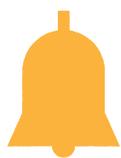
- Feel depressed or alone
- Develop eating disorders or self-harming behaviors
- Begin abusing alcohol or drugs
- Become involved in risky sexual behavior



THE BODY'S ALARM SYSTEM

Everyone has an alarm system in their body that is designed to keep them safe from harm. When activated, this tool prepares the body to fight or run away. The alarm can be activated at any perceived sign of trouble and leave kids feeling scared, angry, irritable, or even withdrawn.

HEALTHY STEPS KIDS CAN TAKE TO RESPOND TO THE ALARM:



- Recognize what activates the alarm and how their body reacts
- Decide whether there is real trouble and seek help from a trusted adult
- Practice deep breathing and other relaxation methods



IMPACT OF TRAUMA

The impact of child traumatic stress can last well beyond childhood. In fact, research has shown that child trauma survivors may experience:

- Learning problems, including lower grades and more suspensions and expulsions
- Increased use of health and mental health services
- Increased involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems
- Long-term health problems (e.g., diabetes and heart disease)

TRAUMA is a risk factor for nearly all behavioral health and substance use disorders.