

Tip Sheets

Strategies to Support Children who have Experienced Trauma

The National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network describes trauma as:

- Experiencing a serious injury to oneself or being a witness to a serious injury or death of another individual.
- Experiencing imminent threat of serious injury or death to oneself or others.
- Experiencing abuse, harm or damage to one's personal physical integrity.

The American Psychological Association describes a traumatic event as an occurrence in which there is a threat of injury, death or of bodily harm to one's self or others. Feelings experienced during this incident include horror, terror and/or helplessness.

The body often has powerful responses to trauma such as a pounding or racing heart, short and rapid breaths and trembling. These physical responses often overwhelm the individual making it difficult to use his usual strategies for coping.

Strategies to Support Children



Children who have experienced and been impacted by trauma benefit from high-quality relationships with others. The following strategies can be used to support these children:

Provide a consistent schedule and routine.

Follow a predictable schedule and display it using visuals so children can follow.

Create an environment that communicates a sense of safety, security and belonging.

Ensure that the physical environment is safe, that children understand the daily schedule, and greet each child by name when they arrive.

Provide the child with opportunities to experience a sense of control.

Create opportunities for children to be helpers. For example, one child could be the door holder and another child could help with snacks.

Prepare children for changes before they occur.

Minimize, plan and prepare children for transitions (no matter how small they may seem to you).

"Tomorrow we will have a special visitor come to talk to us about fire safety. Who do you think that visitor might be?" Place a visual of a fire fighter on the visual schedule.

Provide opportunities to learn and practice self-regulation and prosocial behaviors.

Create opportunities for children to practice turn-taking, sharing, negotiation and cooperation.

Offer choices.

"Do you want to use the red paintbrush or the blue paintbrush?"

Develop positive and productive relationships with families.

Share positive stories with parents about their child's day, greet parents by name, share a newsletter, etc.

Use observation and documentation.

Identify what triggers a child's emotional reactions and implement strategies that help the child to

calm. For example, look for how many times a child bites in an hour. What happens before the biting incident? What happens after the biting incident or what does the child get from the behavior?

Promote development of emotional literacy.

This includes the ability to identify, understand and express emotions in an appropriate and acceptable way; understanding of how feelings affect the body; the ability to identify and understand the emotions of others; the development of empathy for others; and the ability to establish and maintain relationships (i.e. how to make and be a "friend").

Additional Resources

Child Trauma Academy

<http://childtrauma.org>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<http://www.nctsn.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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