

Trauma and Treatment in Youth

The experience of trauma in children and adolescents can take a toll on their otherwise healthy development trajectories. This may occur in children who have experienced or witnessed bullying, abuse, illness or injury, caregiver neglect, violence or natural disasters. Kids exposed to traumatic events may experience issues with attachment to caregivers, engagement with others, success in school, and forming social relationships. It's important they receive support from trusted adults to help cope with these difficult situations and emotions.

What are the signs?

Each child and situation is different. Some may have an emotional or physical response to these traumatic experiences. Reactions can be immediate or delayed and may differ in severity. How a child responds to trauma can also vary by age:

Infant, Toddler and Preschoolers

- Increased fear, sadness or fussiness
- Easily startled
- Unexplained clinginess or isolative behaviors
- Not asking caregivers for support or assistance
- Not seeking comfort, or showing little emotion when comforted by caregiver
- Observing people closely but not engaging in reciprocal social interaction
- Limited facial expressions or smiling
- Bodily complaints (stomach ache, pain, headache)
- Sleep problems



Elementary-Age Children

- Difficulty paying attention at school or at home
- Regressing to younger behavior (thumb sucking, bed wetting)
- Becoming more quiet or withdrawn
- Physical symptoms (nausea, sweating, headache, increased heart rate)
- Verbal expressions of sadness, hopelessness
- Social problems with peers or adults
- Decline in school performance
- Irritability, acting out behaviors, meltdowns
- Sleep problems



Middle and High School-Age Children

- Increased sadness, aggression or agitation
- Sleeping/eating more or less than usual
- Refusing to follow rules and talking back
- Easily startled by a loud sound or movement
- Experiencing frequent nightmares
- Sleep problems



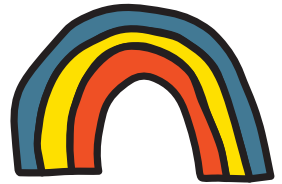
Information developed in collaboration with the On Our Sleeves experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

ON OUR SLEEVES
The Movement for
Children's Mental Health

Wolfson Children's Hospital
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How is trauma treated?

Treatment approaches vary based on the context of the traumatic experience and other individual factors. One effective overarching approach is **Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)**, a strength-based treatment method that promotes awareness of the child's background, including consideration of how past traumatic experiences impact current health and well-being. For instance, trauma-informed approaches replace questions like, "What's wrong with you?" with "What happened to you?" to understand how the child's experiences play a role in their behavior or emotions. TIC aims to reduce the risk of re-traumatization and to teach skills that strengthen a child's ability to be assertive, social and adaptable. This approach focuses on the child and how their caregiver can compassionately support kids as they heal from trauma.



Trauma-Informed Care helps parents increase their child's overall resiliency and emotion regulation, specifically their ability to tolerate and cope with adversity. This is accomplished in many ways, most directly through fostering nurturing parental relationships, promoting open communication, and practicing active coping strategies. TIC also builds upon the family's existing protective factors to increase resiliency. Protective factors are the features of one's personality or environment that can reduce the risk of emotional and behavioral crises. These factors can help young people feel supported and strong when problems arise.

[Click here to explore the TIC concept of "What's strong in you?"](#)

