

# Understanding & Screening for Trauma in Young Children

This companion guide is to support you in screening for trauma in children ages 0-5.



## 1 IMMEDIATE STABILIZATION

- Self-harm
- Suicidal ideation
- Sleeping concerns
- Eating concerns
- Safety concerns (child, parent, environment, etc...)

## 2 TRAUMA HISTORY

Exposure to or hearing about a stressful or traumatic event, such as:

- Abuse (or exposure to): Physical, emotional, sexual
- Neglectful home environment
- Exposure to violence: Domestic or chronic
- Pre-natal exposure to alcohol, drugs or maternal stress
- Impaired parenting: Mental illness, substance abuse, etc...
- Lengthy or multiple separations from parent or living outside of the home
- Medical emergencies, hospitalizations, or surgeries
- Loss of significant people, places, etc...

## 3 CURRENT BEHAVIORS AND REACTIONS

Traumatic stress responses or traumatic reactions can include:

- Regression in functioning and behavior
- Learning impairments or developmental concerns
- Inability to soothe
- Poor appetite, low weight, digestive problems
- Difficulty with sleep and/or nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating
- Verbally or physically aggressive
- Somatic complaints
- Lacks self-confidence
- Distress at reminder of trauma or avoidance of the trauma
- Sexual behaviors not typical for age
- Hyperarousal: Hypervigilance, anxiety, anger outbursts, increased startle response, etc...
- Hypoarousal: Appears withdrawn, nonresponsive, emotionally withdrawn, etc...

Any stressful or traumatic event can impact a young child, including hearing or learning about the event.

## 4 ATTACHMENT

A child's mental health and development is directly impacted by their attachment with the primary caregiver(s) and their environment. Consider the caregiver's mental health, trauma history, stress in the home, and other traumatic experiences when evaluating the need to refer a child for a Trauma Assessment.

### REFER

Refer to a trauma-informed mental health therapist for a Trauma Assessment and consult a physician:

- If there are any immediate stabilization concerns.
- If there has been trauma identified and there are current reactions and behaviors present.
- If there are current reactions and behaviors identified and you are unsure if trauma has occurred.
- If there are relational concerns with parents or caregivers.

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#### References:

- National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network
- DC: 0-5 Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Development Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood
- Southwest Michigan Trauma Assessment Center: Trauma Screen Checklist