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Trauma-Informed Care Resource

This Resource is meant to help you care for yourself as well as the children and families in your program after a disaster or emergency situation.

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Trauma

Trauma is an emotional or physical response to a very stressful or even life-threatening event. Trauma overwhelms our ability to cope and can create feelings of fear, helplessness or unsafety.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) explains trauma through the three Es:

- Event (what happened)
- Experience (how each person perceived the event)
- Effects (short- and long-term consequences of the event)

People experience traumatic events differently based on their unique life experiences and the ways they process situations. Children, in particular, respond differently to trauma based on age, developmental stage, emotional availability of caregivers and the nature of the traumatic event. It is common for children and adults who have experienced the same traumatic event to see the circumstances differently and react differently as a result.

Symptoms

Children might exhibit any combination of the following symptoms:

- Clinginess
- Excessive crying
- Inability to be soothed
- Hyperactivity
- Disobedience
- Separation anxiety
- Developmental regression
- Difficulty feeding, eating, sleeping, toileting or speaking
- Attention-seeking, aggressive or withdrawn behaviors
- Repetitive play acting out or talking about the traumatic event
- Avoidance of anything that reminds them of the traumatic event
- Cognitive concerns (challenges with memory, concentration and learning)
- Physical symptoms (headaches, tummy aches, etc.)

Children's behaviors in response to a traumatic event can sometimes be addressed using traditional approaches (redirection, removing a child from a situation, etc.). Other times, trauma-informed approaches may be needed.

If symptoms last longer than a few weeks or appear suddenly later on, children may need more support.

Adults may experience any of the following:

- Pounding heart, rapid breathing, shakiness, sweating
- Jumpiness and feeling more alert
- Upsetting dreams, memories or flashbacks
- Emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, helplessness, sadness or shame
- Feeling too much (overwhelmed) or too little (shocked or numb)
- Being irritable or getting easily upset
- Withdrawing, having difficulty trusting others or feeling detached
- Negative views of life or the world
- Difficulty eating or sleeping
- Avoidance of anything that reminds them of the traumatic event
- Cognitive concerns (challenges with memory, concentration, etc.)
- Physical symptoms (headache, stomach upset, other bodily pain or worsening of current health conditions)
- Increased alcohol or drug use

If certain symptoms persist for a month or more, an adult may meet criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and benefit from mental health support.



Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-informed care (TIC) involves recognizing and responding to the impact of trauma, embedding awareness, knowledge and skills into a program's culture, policies and practices. Physical and psychological safety are prioritized to support the coping and recovery of children, families and providers.

The SAMHSA explains TIC through the four Rs. A child care program:

- *Realizes* that the impacts of trauma are widespread and understands how to move to recovery.
- *Recognizes* the symptoms of trauma in children, families and providers.
- *Responds* by incorporating knowledge about trauma into culture, policies and practices.
- *Resists re-traumatizing* children, families and providers.

Children

As caring adults in children's lives, child care providers can help children get through traumatic events in healthy ways.

- Focus on the children, not the trauma. Take deep breaths to prevent showing intense emotions and move through stressful moments.
- Help children express their emotions. Facilitate writing, drawing, singing and discussion about the traumatic event. Allow time for creative and recreational play. Ask children what worries them or what might help them feel better.
- Listen actively and validate children's feelings (e.g., "It makes sense that you're sad," or "It's okay to feel angry.") Speak in a calm, gentle voice. Offer comfort and allow them to cry.
 - Note: Some well-intended statements may be less helpful than we hope. For example, "You're okay," and "You'll be fine," may seem reassuring but could actually cause a child not to feel heard or to feel dismissed. Instead, say things like, "This is really hard," and "I'm here for you."
- Limit exposure to media coverage (television, social media or news outlets) of the traumatic event.
- Return to children's routines to create stability in uncertain moments.
- Help children see the good. Focus on heroic actions, helpful family and friends and community support to reduce fear and increase connectedness.
- Empower children with opportunities to help others. Facilitate drawing or writing letters to people who were hurt or to those who helped.
- Model self-care with sufficient sleep and healthy meals and exercise.

Above all else, make sure children feel cared about and loved.

Families

When disasters happen, families look to you for information and support.

- *Keep families informed.* Give families the information they need to understand the traumatic event, the actions that were taken and what will happen moving forward.
- *Empathize with families.* When families express worries, concerns and emotions related to the traumatic event, listen actively and validate their feelings. You are an important part of families' network of support.
- *Partner with families* on children's symptoms of trauma. When you notice a new behavior, let the family know, and ask the family to do the same. Work together on how you will support the child in care and at home, and maintain open communication.
- *Refer families to resources.* Emergencies sometimes leave us without what we need – food, clothing, shelter, etc. Aid families in finding the help they need by calling [Indiana 211](#) or searching the [Family Resource Navigator](#).

Providers

Take care of yourself. Amidst a traumatic event at your child care program or in your community, you are a human first. Engage in healthy self-care to stay strong for yourself and the children in your care.

- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or short meditations.
- Check in with other child care providers and talk regularly with close friends and family members.
- Do something you love. Paint, draw, listen to music, watch a favorite film, etc.
- Eat healthy foods and get some exercise and good sleep.
- Maintain boundaries. Say “no” when you need to, and ask others for help.
- Connect spiritually in ways that are meaningful to you.
- Journal when you wake up or before you go to bed.
- Be gentle with yourself. It's okay not to be okay. If it's helpful, take things one day, one hour and one minute at a time.

You can only pour from what is in your cup. First, love yourself.

Resources

- Children and families that have experienced trauma benefit from mental health support. [Infancy Onward](#) can offer training and resources to your program. Refer families in need of extra support to community mental health services by calling [Indiana 211](#) or searching the [Family Resource Navigator](#).
- Check out [free meditation resources](#) to support mindfulness and your self-care.
- Call the OECOSL Child Care Support Line at 1.800.299.1627 for support with policies and practices that prevent suspension and expulsion of children who have experienced trauma.
- Learn more about supporting children who have experienced trauma through resources from the following organizations: the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#), [ZERO TO THREE](#), the [National Center for Children in Poverty](#), [Save the Children](#), [ready.gov](#) and more.