

Understanding Childhood Trauma & Tips for Caregivers

*Attachment and Trauma Treatment Centre for Healing
Healing life's hurts through awareness, compassion & self-care*



Trauma experiences can be the result of many things including: abuse, loss, exposure to domestic violence, or separation and divorce. Trauma can result from directly experiencing these things or from witnessing them.

What Does Trauma look like?

- Hyperarousal
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty focusing
- Dissociation
- Regressive behaviours
- Hypervigilance
- Engaging in risky behaviour
- Sudden changes in mood
- Headaches/stomachache

Trauma's Impact on learning and school performance

Trauma experiences impact learning because of the way fear and terror create changes in the brain & nervous system.

A child who experiences trauma may become frozen in an activated state of arousal which may include a persistent fear for their safety and a heightened state of alert.

This aroused state of fear makes it difficult for a child to:

- Process verbal information
- Following direction
- Recall what was heard
- Making sense out of what is being said
- Focus
- Retain information



Trauma is a Sensory Experience

- Educate all school staff in understanding trauma and how it impacts children
- Provide nurturing environments (both through staff-child relationships & physical spaces)
- Provide movement activities throughout the day to regulate the body and mind
- Replace punitive behaviour interventions by recognizing triggers quickly and encouraging children to identify and regulate (see tips below) their big emotions
- Encourage joy and laughter – this stimulates higher order thinking
- Limit electronic use, this activates the part of the brain that increases dysregulation
- Closely monitor peer interactions – if play interactions escalate to quickly dysregulation may occur.



Strategies to Promote Regulation

- Encourage deep tummy breathing with activities and tools such as bubbles & pinwheels
- Help centre children to the present. Ask questions like: What do you hear, taste, feel around you. Help them use their senses to tune into the here and now (a state of mindfulness).
- Introduce them to guided imagery with sensory input – have them visualize a relaxation space (what does it feel like, smell like, taste like, sound like, etc.)



Lori Gill, CEO and Lead Trauma Therapist is a Certified Trauma Specialist and Trainer for the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children. ATCH offers evidenced-based and evidenced-informed training for schools and clinicians based on current research and best practice. To learn more about training opportunities for your school, inclusive of intervention strategies, please contact reception@atrch.org or call (905) 684-9333.