

Trauma Informed Care Toolkit

Information for Youth: The following information about trauma is especially for teens.



Stress and trauma are common in our lives. However, when trauma seriously threatens our safety and security or happens repeatedly, it can change us in surprising ways. Trauma can affect our bodies, our brains and the way we act for the rest of our lives.

Why Is This Important? View a video about how others have been affected by violence, which is one type of trauma.

<http://www.acesconnection.com/clip/through-our-eyes-children-violence-and-trauma-8-min>

What is Trauma?

How Often Does Trauma Happen?

What Can I Do To Feel Better?



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What is Trauma?

Trauma refers to an intense event that is scary, dangerous or violent. Often people who experience trauma feel afraid, helpless and/or horrified.

Sometimes people also talk about **toxic stress** which refers to bad experiences that happen over and over and make us feel scared and upset.

Examples of trauma include: accidents, injuries, serious illnesses, fires, crime, violence (in the home or the neighborhood), death of a loved one, separation from a loved one through illness or deportation, physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, molestation or exploitation, homelessness, natural disasters, bullying, poverty, living in or escaping from a war zone, and acts of terrorism.

What Happens to People When They Experience Trauma or Toxic Stress?

When trauma and toxic stress happen, it affects us physically and mentally. Our hearts beat faster, our blood pressure goes up and chemicals in our bodies get us ready to fight, flee or freeze. We get very alert and only think about the danger that is right in front of us. These changes often go away once the danger is past.

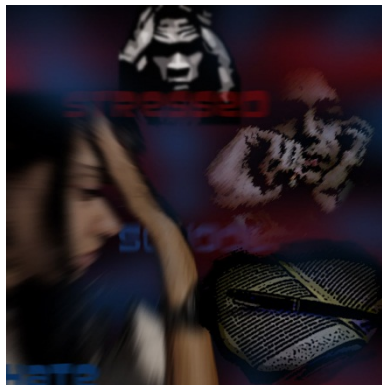
When the memories and feelings connected to trauma stay strong for at least a month, we call that traumatic stress. **Traumatic Stress** refers to the ways that trauma affects a person's life after the event is over. Traumatic stress includes the event and the person's experience or feelings about the event. In other words :

$$\text{Traumatic Stress} = \text{Event} + \text{Experience (Feelings)}$$

Traumatic stress affects a person's behavior, feelings, relationships and view of the world. It can also lead to health and mental health problems later in life.

People who have had 4 or more traumatic experiences are more likely to:

- Cope by smoking, drinking or using drugs
- Take part in risky behaviors such as unprotected sex
- Suffer from depression, anxiety or uncontrollable anger
- Develop health problems later in life, such as heart disease or breathing problems



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How Often Does Trauma Happen?

In Michigan about half of all youth (0-17 years) have had at least one traumatic event. Nearly one in three have had two or more traumatic events before the age of 18. Not all traumatic events lead to traumatic stress. People who have had more traumatic events have an increased risk of traumatic stress and additional trauma.

How Do I Know if I Have Been Affected by Trauma?

After a trauma, people may experience some of the following things:

- Trouble concentrating
- Mood swings
- Low self-esteem
- Self-injury/cutting
- Relationship problems
- Sad and depressed
- Hard time sleeping
- Anxiety
- Not able to trust people
- Age inappropriate behaviors
- Eating disorders
- Heavy drug or alcohol use

People may also find that they are:

- Re-living the trauma, e.g. through nightmares or flashbacks
- “On edge” or irritable a lot of the time
- Avoiding reminders of the trauma
- Not able to feel happy or loving

If these things are happening for more than a month, it is a good idea to get help.

What Can I Do to Feel Better?

It is normal to feel badly after a trauma, especially if the trauma is repeated. Here are some things you can do to feel better:

- Get Emotional: talk to a trusted friend or caring adult
- Get Mindful: Stop what you’re doing, pay attention to what’s happening in your body, and breathe deeply
- Get Physical: Move your body-stretch, walk, run, or dance
- Get Creative: Try writing in a journal, drawing, painting, or singing
- Get Spiritual: Meditate, go out in nature or go to a religious place of worship
- Get Community: Volunteer or participate in a group

(Source: Adolescent Health Working Group. “Trauma & Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit”, <https://rodriguezgsarah.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/traumaresbooklet-web.pdf>)

People have found many different ways to heal from trauma. The resources below offer some ideas that have been helpful to others. However, if you continue to feel badly, it is always a good idea to talk with an adult you can trust such as a parent, relative, counselor, health provider, teacher or religious leader. They may be able to help you find the right kind of support.