

The Impact of Trauma on Child Development and Functioning

When trauma is associated with the failure of those who should be protecting and nurturing the child, it has profound and far-reaching effects on nearly every aspect of the child's life. Children who have experienced the types of trauma that precipitate entry into the child welfare system typically suffer impairments in many areas of development and functioning, including:

Attachment: Traumatized children feel that the world is uncertain and unpredictable. They can become socially isolated and can have difficulty relating to and empathizing with others.

Biology: Traumatized children may experience problems with movement and sensation, including hypersensitivity to physical contact and insensitivity to pain. They may exhibit unexplained physical symptoms and increased medical problems.

Mood Regulation: Children exposed to trauma can have difficulty regulating their emotions as well as difficulty knowing and describing their feelings and internal states.

Cognition: Traumatized children can have problems focusing on and completing tasks, or planning for and anticipating future events. Some exhibit learning difficulties and problems with language development.

Dissociation: Some traumatized children experience a feeling of detachment or depersonalization, as if they are “observing” something happening to them that is unreal.

Behavioral Control: Traumatized children can show poor impulse control, self-destructive behavior, and aggression towards others.

Self-Concept: Traumatized children frequently suffer from disturbed body image, low self-esteem, shame and guilt.