

What is the Potential Trauma to Children During Removal?

1. Surprise, shock, chaos (e.g., drug bust)

- This is dependent upon how people are reacting. Parent's behavior may escalate which can further traumatize the child.
- Especially traumatic when it happens suddenly, unexpectedly. Children see their parents in great distress and that distresses them.
- Presence and intrusion of multiple strangers in the home – police, caseworker. In tribal communities it is common to have tribal police, tribal worker, and state police and caseworker.

2. Negative view of police and DHS

- It depends on what the child has been told. Parents may have told them that police and DHS are bad, so they fear them.
- Children may have heard horror stories about foster care.
- Children may have prior experience with DHS.

3. Loss of control, sense of being kidnapped, powerlessness, helplessness

- Being taken against their will, and to the great distress of their parents.
- Distress at seeing their parents interrogated and arrested.

4. Betrayal, loss of trust, reinforcement or exacerbation of previous loss of trust – a sense that the world is unsafe.

- Children coming out of a dangerous situation may expect that they are going into another dangerous situation.
- There may be no one trustworthy (in child's eyes) to talk to.
- Feeling betrayed by the person they "told."

5. Confusion, unpredictability, it doesn't make sense.

- Children may not understand why they are being removed. They may think, "all we were doing was carving pumpkins and they came and took us away."
- Example: In one family the children were removed for neglect due to substandard housing. However, mom was feeding and bathing kids regularly and they were very emotionally bonded. The children's experience was that their mom was a good mom who took care of them the best she could.

6. Fear of the unknown, lack of information.

- They don't know what's going to happen now.
- They don't know how to negotiate the unknown.
- They don't know who these people are or where they are going. We tell kids not to talk to or trust strangers and these are strangers.

7. Sense of guilt or failure

- May have been warned by parents about what will happen if they "tell."
- Seeing their family torn apart and may be asked by parent "you didn't say that, did you?"
- Child may have taken on a degree of responsibility of taking care of their parents, or their siblings, and feel they have failed.
- Fear and guilt that what is happening is their fault.