

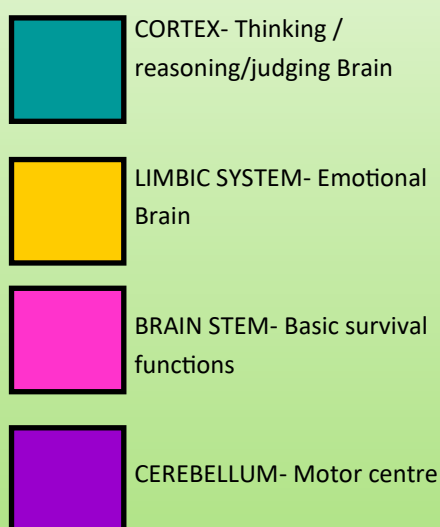
INTRODUCTION TO TRAUMA



What is Trauma?



Trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful, or life threatening and that has lasting and adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.



Systems in the CORTEX—the Thinking brain is where we do our Decision making, Learning, Planning, Reflection, Regulation and Creativity.

Systems in the LIMBIC— Emotional brain is where we do our Feeling, Connection and Remembering, also the Doing brain

Systems in the CEREBELLUM are responsible for our balance, co-ordinating movement and vision.

Systems in the BRAIN STEM are responsible for regulating heart rate, blood pressure and arousal states.

The brain develops in a sequence e.g. the brain stem first, then the more complex cortex and limbic systems and these become fully functioning at different times during childhood. If abuse, neglect, violence and aggression is present, then this can impact on the process and a child's abilities and development.

What happens to the brain during trauma?



The Brain is a complex organ, it controls emotion, touch, thought, memory, breathing, motor skills and every process that regulates our body.

The **Doing** brain (in the Limbic system) responds to threat, extreme danger and intense emotions. This is designed to act like a smoke alarm that goes off if our brain thinks we are in danger and helps us to take care of ourselves.

The **Thinking** brain helps us plan, problem solve and analyse situations rationally and make decisions. When the **Doing** brain alerts us that there is danger present, the **Thinking** brain is designed to check things out e.g. we hear a loud noise, the **Doing** brain sends a signal to the **Thinking** brain that you might be in danger. The **Thinking** brain checks it out (and see that the wind closed the door) and sends a message to the **Doing** brain that you are not in danger. But if the **Thinking** brain determines that you are in danger (e.g. the **Thinking** brain sees a gun and hears a gun shot) the **Thinking** brain sends a message to the **Doing** brain that you are in danger. The **Thinking** brain then shuts down to allow the **Doing** brain to do what ever it needs to do to keep ourself safe. (e.g. Survival, **fight/flight/freeze**). The **Doing** brain releases chemicals to prepare us for action, e.g. bring it up-adrenalin, calm us down and help to regulate our body.

Our body is designed to remember dangers so if the same things happens again, the body can respond quickly. Sometimes something will happen that reminds us of past events and make us feel in danger, even though we might not be in danger, this is called a **Trigger** and this can be smells, sounds, words, tone of voice. It is important to understand that individuals cannot control these reactions to signs of danger, it is part of the way our body is wired to respond to keep us safe.

What Survival looks like

Fight, Flight, Freeze



Noticing FIGHT

- * Hot and bothered
- * Argumentative, angry, aggressive
- * Controlling, demanding and inflexible
- * Lie or blaming
- * Unable to concentrate on one thing
- * Confrontational
- * Unable to follow rules

Grounding FIGHT

- * Tell me you love me even when I push you away
- * Don't punish me for being cross, reward me with your kindness and love for getting calm again
- * Give me a task that makes me feel important
- * Connect with me and show me empathy before exploring consequences of my behaviour

Continued...

Noticing FLIGHT

- * Hyperactive, manic, silly
- * Aggressive, threatening, stiffening up, clenching fists
- * Running away, escaping, disappearing, hiding under the table/bed/sofa
- * Disruptive, loud, noisy
- * Can't follow rules, not doing what you've asked

Grounding FLIGHT

- * Keep me close by
- * Find me again happily or patiently
- * Tell me I am safe with you
- * Create a safe space where I can hide away
- * Talk through what you think I am finding tricky using a kind voice

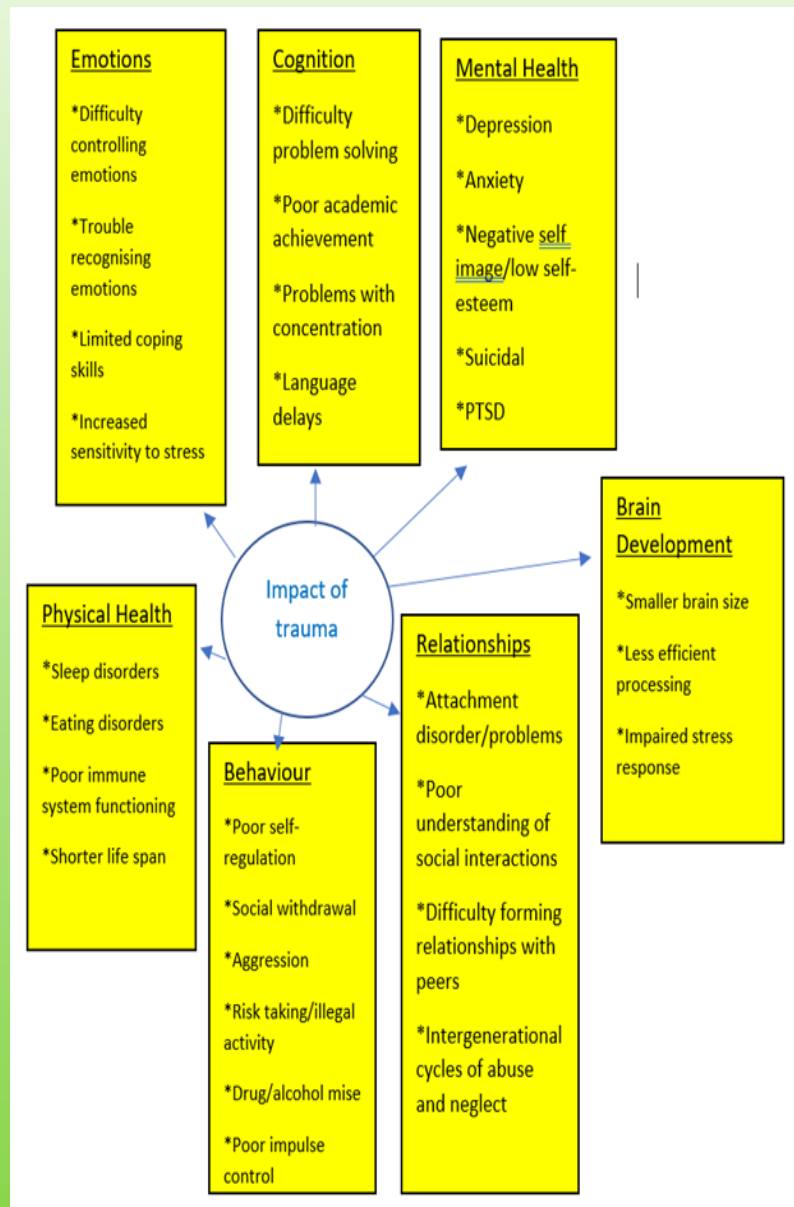
Noticing FREEZE

- * Bored, not interested
 - * Confused, forgetful
 - * Distracted, not listening
 - * Clumsy
 - * Not moving to where you've asked
- Day dreaming, staring into space

Grounding FREEZE

- * Stay with me, don't leave me
- Tell me I am ok and that I am safe
- If I have forgotten what I was supposed to be doing, remind me again gently
- Gently wonder where I have gone and invite me back to you

How does Trauma Impact a person?



What you need to know?



The impact of Trauma continues for children, even after they have left the care of their parents. Being removed from their parents, even if the environment is unsafe, it is traumatising for children and scary. Most children love their parents regardless of the quality of their relationships, therefore being removed creates further stress, grief and loss and can be overwhelming.

Children who have experienced trauma will come to you with different behaviours, ways of coping with stress, ways of relating to people compared to children who haven't experienced trauma. Therefore traditional parenting techniques that you may have used with your own children, will have limited effect and could make the behaviours and feelings of the child worse.

Children may have difficulty with:

Trust– Children may find it hard to trust anyone, they may trust too easily making them more vulnerable to exploitation. They may struggle to judge the intention of another and make poor choices in who they trust.

Managing stress– Children may avoid or withdraw from day to day interactions, have difficulty sleeping, avoid sensory activities, can become easily over excited, they may appear to not be listening 'zone out', create chaos in a calm environment.

Empathy– Children may feel out of 'sync' with others, even those whom they have a more secure relationship with. They may cause harm to others and not appear remorseful, misinterpret how others might feel even with simple emotions, have difficulty recognising and verbalising their own feelings and struggle to understand the feelings of others.

Continued...



Impulse— Children may struggle to follow rules, have an inability to explain their behaviour, have difficulty understanding and adhering to social norms, particularly in group settings, are easily influenced by others, not knowing when to stop and damage own or others property.

Anger— Children can escalate from calm to angry very quickly, may take a long time to calm down, struggle to take part in group activities, scare others or make them feel tense., have difficulty in making and keeping friends.

Eating— Children may hide or hoard food, over eat or vomit.



Developmentally :

Motor co-ordination— Children may have difficulties with gross motor (balance, movement), and fine motor skills (holding a pencil, managing buttons).

Language— Children may struggle with understanding and expressing language.

Social— Children may misinterpret social cues, , acting younger or older in age, ability to make and keep friends and interacting with others.

Cognitive— Children may have difficulties with attention and concentration, difficulties with making sense of and retaining new information and learning difficulties.



Helpful strategies

Be aware of your own stress levels before responding to the child

Try to **see beyond the behaviour** and understand what the child might be feeling but is unable to tell you e.g. they are feeling scared, frustrated etc.

Be **consistent, predictable** and **repetitive**. The child will most likely be sensitive to changes in routine, schedule, transitions and new situations. Consistency and predictability will help them to feel safe and secure e.g. same meal times, same bedtime routine and if things are going to change, the warn them in advance.

Time in, not Time out. The child is not deliberately seeking attention, they are Needing attention. Bringing a stressed, scared child close to you will help them to feel safe, whereas putting them in a space away can trigger negative thoughts and feelings. E.g. 'I can see you are having a tough time, why don't you come and sit next to me'.

Stop, Listen and **talk** with the child, it will assist the child to tell you how they are feeling. Explain to the child what you see, this will help them to develop language about their feelings e.g. 'You look sad today, I can tell because you have tears in your eyes.'

Parent based on **emotional age** if a child is stressed or fearful, they may regress to a younger age. You will be better able to be soothed if you parent them as if they were at that age.

Help the child develop appropriate social behaviours by **modelling them yourself** and telling them what and why you are doing this e.g. 'I am going to wash my hands before dinner because...'

Have realistic expectations of the child. Children with abuse/neglect backgrounds already have a number of hurdles to overcome and some may not overcome all of them. **Be Patient, Progress may be slow**

Useful resources and contacts

The Centre for Excellence in Child Trauma– Sarah Naish- <https://www.coect.co.uk/sarah-naish/>

Dr Bruce Perry-<http://childtrauma.org>

Parenting and family support- www.familylives.org.uk

Parents Protect– www.parentsprotect.org