



**GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE
FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT
LEGAL INSTITUTE**

**The Impact of Child Trauma on System-Involved
Children and Youth in Kansas**

Part II

**The Impact of Trauma on Children
in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems**

**Part II Overview: The Impact of Trauma
on System-Involved Children**

- What is child trauma?
- The short- and long-term impacts of child trauma
- Recognizing maladaptive coping strategies
- Impact of trauma in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems
- What can child welfare workers do?

What is child trauma?

- Child trauma refers to a child's witnessing or experiencing an event that is a real or perceived threat to the life or well-being of the child or someone close to the child
- The event overwhelms the child's ability to cope, causing fear, helplessness, or horror

Examples of child trauma

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Abandonment or neglect
- Death or loss of a loved one
- Life-threatening illness of a caregiver
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Bullying
- Witnessing or experiencing community violence

Types of trauma: acute trauma

Single traumatic event that is limited in time.

- Earthquake
 - Motor vehicle accident
 - School shooting
 - Physical/sexual assault
 - Terrorist attack
 - Natural disaster
- Increased heart rate, overwhelming emotions

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

Types of trauma: chronic trauma

When a child experiences multiple traumatic events, the child can suffer chronic trauma.

Examples:

- Child is exposed to domestic violence, then gets in a car accident, then witnesses community violence

Chronic overwhelm can decrease a child's resilience to ordinary stress.

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

Types of trauma: complex trauma

Complex trauma describes:

1. Exposure to chronic trauma, and
 2. The immediate and long-term impact of the exposure on the child.
- Children in the child welfare system likely experienced chronic and complex trauma without consistent and supportive caregivers.
 - Trauma history is important!

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

Types of trauma: historical trauma

- Historical trauma is a historical event or prolonged experience that continues to have an impact over several generations
- Examples:
 - Slavery
 - Removal from homelands
 - Massacres, genocides, ethnocides
 - Forced placement in boarding schools; forced out-adoption

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

Types of trauma: neglect

- Neglect is defined as the failure to provide for a child's basic physical, medical, educational, and emotional needs
- It is the most common form of maltreatment
- Often occurs alongside periods of abandonment and abuse
- Frequently associated with other forms of adversity

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

What is the impact of trauma?

- Trauma impacts children's safety, permanence, and well-being in many ways
- **Safety:** trauma can damage a child's ability to regulate moods and behavior; lack of trust can inhibit reporting; traumatic reactions can dull a child's emotions and cause skepticism
- **Permanency:** inability to regulate moods can threaten stable placements & reunification

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

What is the impact of trauma?

- **Well-being:** trauma can have both short- and long-term impacts on the child's mental and physical health, relational capacity, functioning, and life trajectory
 - Impaired ability to learn
 - Impaired relationship development
 - Hopelessness can sap motivation
 - Mistrust of the world

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
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Trauma and overwhelming emotion: maladaptive coping

- Trauma can elicit intense emotions that can interfere with age-appropriate self-regulation
- Trauma may be “stored” in the body
- Children may over- or under-control behavior:
 - Rigid and repetitive behavior
 - Difficulty with change in routine, activity, etc.
 - Difficulty planning, organizing, delaying gratification
 - Impulsivity, disorganization, aggression, acting out

Trauma and overwhelming emotion: maladaptive coping

- Behaviors can undermine foster placements:
 - Sleeping, eating, elimination problems
 - High activity levels, irritability, acting out
 - Emotional detachment, unresponsiveness, distance, numbness
 - Hypervigilance
 - Increased mental health issues (depression, anxiety)
 - Unexpected/exaggerated response to “no”

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

Impact of trauma in the child welfare system

- Children entering the child welfare system have encountered early adversity, almost by definition
 - Separations and frequent moves
 - Poverty
 - Racism and other discrimination
 - School problems
 - Grief and loss

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

Impact of trauma in the child welfare system

- Significant numbers of children in the child welfare system are likely to be suffering from child traumatic stress
 - More likely to have depression, school behavior problems, peer relationship problems, difficulties with mood regulation, cognition, self-concept
 - PTSD is relatively common and generally co-occurs with depression, anxiety, or oppositional defiant disorder

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
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Impact of trauma in the child welfare system

- 6,441 children were in out-of-home care in Kansas in 2013
- “Foster care alumni” suffer a higher rate of PTSD (21.5%) compared to general pop (4.5%)
 - Higher than Vietnam vets (15%) and Iraq vets (12% to 13%)
 - By 17, 62% of youth in foster care will exhibit symptoms of mental health disorder and trauma

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
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Impact of trauma in the juvenile justice system

- More than 93% of juvenile offenders report at least one ACE
- More than 65% of juvenile offenders have mental health consequences from trauma
- In 2013, 813 children lived in juvenile correction facilities in Kansas

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
Training materials

Impact of trauma in the juvenile justice system

- Some practices in juvenile detention centers can trigger and “stack” trauma:
 - Seclusion (especially if neglected)
 - Restraint (especially if physically abused)
 - Room confinement (especially if neglected)
 - Strip searches (especially if sexually abused)
 - Witnessing attacks/fear of attacks
 - Separation from family/community

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma
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Impact of trauma in the juvenile justice system

- The Justice Department reports that in 2003, 70% of youth in the system had experienced serious trauma
- Nearly 30% reported a history of prior abuse, with a strong correlation to suicide
- 35% reported being isolated; 87% said longer than 2 hours, 55% said longer than 24 hours

Juvenile Offenders and Victims 2014
Report, OJJDP

Ten things for juvenile court judges

1. A traumatic experience is an event that threatens someone's life, safety, or well-being.
2. Child traumatic stress can lead to PTSD.
3. Trauma impacts a child's development and health throughout their life.
4. Complex trauma is associated with risk of delinquency.
5. Traumatic exposure, delinquency, and school failure are related.

Adapted from a technical assistance
bulletin by NCJFCJ, NCTSN, and OJJDP

Ten things for juvenile court judges

6. Trauma assessments can reduce misdiagnosis, promote positive outcomes, and maximize resources.
7. There are mental health treatments that are effective in helping youth who are experiencing child traumatic stress.
8. There is a compelling need for effective family involvement.
9. Youth are resilient.
10. JJ system needs to be trauma-informed and trauma-responsive at all levels.

Adapted from a technical assistance bulletin by NCJFCJ, NCTSN, and OJJDP

What can child welfare workers do?

- “Trauma lens”: remember that most children and families in the system have multiple ACEs
- Consider that many children will have a lifetime trauma history, including acute, chronic, complex, and/or historical
- Learn about varieties of trauma and seek more information
- Refer appropriately for trauma treatment

Adapted from NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma Training materials