

CAN CHILDREN BE IMPACTED IN THE FUTURE FROM STRESS THAT HAPPENS NOW?

Yes! When children experience stress and trauma without adequate support from adults, this can contribute to chronic physical illnesses, mental illness, problems in the growth and formation of the brain and organs, and impact the child's ability to learn.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

As a caregiver, you are the best person to help your child cope with stress and trauma. Your relationship with your child is very important.

- Remember that experiencing small amounts of stress with the support of an adult is not bad and will help your child learn how to cope better with stress in the future.
- Remember that children can experience stress and trauma even if they do not look like they are.
- Recognize that your child can experience stress or trauma even when you do not find a situation stressful.
- Teach children how to soothe themselves, e.g., deep breathing, blowing bubbles, laughing, or playing drums.
- Help children release the chemicals that are released in their body during stress, e.g., dance with them, laugh, talk, or go for a walk.
- Try to be consistent and re-establish routines during and after stress and trauma.
- Get outside support for yourself so you can deal with the effects stress and trauma have on you. This will help you support your child.



trauma, stress,
and **YOUNG**
children

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What is Stress and Trauma?

STRESS is the way that our body reacts to things that are new or threatening in our lives.

TRAUMA happens when we feel our physical or emotional safety is threatened or when it actually is threatened, for example, by abuse.

CAN YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCE STRESS AND TRAUMA?

Many people do not believe that young children experience stress and trauma. However, young children, including infants, can experience stress and trauma. Stress can have both positive and negative effects on a child. If a child experiences mild to moderate stress and has support from her caregiver, she can learn skills that will help her deal with stress in the future.

DO YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCE STRESS/TRAUMA THE SAME WAY ADULTS DO?

Children go through the same responses to stress and trauma as adults. There are some differences though. First, many adults have learned ways to cope with stress, and children have not. Second, young children are more likely to experience stress responses than adults, because each experience children have is new. Third, a young child will interpret and respond to stress and trauma in age appropriate ways that are different than adults.

WHAT HAPPENS IN A YOUNG CHILD'S BODY WHEN HE EXPERIENCES STRESS OR TRAUMA?

The basis of the human stress response system in everybody is instinctual. This means that the stress response is not under our control. It exists to keep us safe. It starts when we come in contact with something that is new, threatening, uncontrollable, or unpredictable.

Like adults, when children react to stress, their heart rate may increase and their palms might get sweaty. This is caused by chemicals in the body that are released during stress that allow the body to react in ways that can keep it safe. For example, one of the chemicals that is released by the stress response system is adrenaline. This gives organs and muscles extra drive and stamina that may be needed to be safe.

These chemicals stay in the body until they are able to be released. Adults release these chemicals by such things as crying, shaking, exercising, or talking.

WHAT ARE THE SHORT TERM IMPACTS OF EXPERIENCING STRESS/TRAUMA ON YOUNG CHILDREN?

Stress and trauma can affect every aspect of children's health. For example, they may begin to have nightmares or night terrors, they may have physical complaints (e.g., stomach aches) or they may seem to be always aware of everything that goes on around them (hypervigilance).

This may happen without the children being aware of why it is happening. Children who have experienced stress or trauma may begin to think normal everyday events are threatening.

Sometimes the behaviours of children who have experienced stress or trauma may be hard to deal with, e.g., impulsivity, tantrums, aggressiveness, frequent crying, and irritability.