

Navigating Changes in the Family

Participants Guide

Objectives

This workshop will cover:

- Overview of **Trauma Invested Practices**
- Exploring **types of changes and impact on children**
- **Strategies** to help your child cope

✓ Defining Trauma

- Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person's capacity to cope.
- Keep in mind the experience does not have to be life threatening to trigger a trauma response.

✓ Impact of Trauma

Early childhood trauma affects every aspect of children's stress regulation. Trauma can attribute to a child's inability to find and sustain a comfortable level of arousal.

- Low energy
- Lack of motivation
- Aggression
- Defiance

Trauma Invested Practices: The Foundation



✓ The Three Rs to Intervention

- **Relationship:** Just one safe, connected adult can help build resilience in a child
- **Responsibility:** Follow through on what you say or promise and express importance of following through even in difficult times
- **Regulation:** Emotional regulation strategies start in the body and move to the mind.



Types of Change and What to Expect

- Examples of Big Changes: divorce or separation, family illness, death of a loved one, new school, new sibling, financial hardship
- Examples of “Small” Changes: adjustments to routine or schedule, transition to new grade level/new teacher, developmental changes,
- Even changes considered positive can lead to difficulties adjusting
- Children don’t always know how to handle complex emotions associated with stress, so they rely on behaviors as both a coping mechanism and a signal to others that something isn’t right.
- For those who have experienced prolonged or chronic stressors, behaviors may not appear until the child returns to a safe or stable environment.
- When children are in a safe space, they may feel more comfortable expressing and exploring feelings of anxiety, stress, and trauma.

Signs of Fears, Excessive Worry and Anxiety	
Age Group	Reactions
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased fear of being alone • Increased bad dreams • Increase in or changes to loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting • Changes in appetite • Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors
School Age (ages 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability, whining, aggressive behaviors • Clinging, nightmares • Sleep/appetite disturbances • Physical symptoms (headaches/stomach aches) • Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest • Competition for parent’s attention • Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school
Adolescent (ages 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical symptoms (headaches/stomach aches/rashes) • Sleep/appetite disturbances • Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy • Ignoring health promotion behaviors • Isolating from peers and loved ones • Concerns about stigma and injustices • Avoiding/cutting virtual school

Source: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



All Behavior Has a Function: To Obtain or To Avoid/Escape

- **To Obtain:** *I need or I want...*
 - Objects
 - Activities
 - Attention/Emotions
 - Sensory input
- **To Avoid/Escape:** *I need to escape...*
 - People
 - Objects
 - Activities
 - Attention/Emotions
 - Sensory input



Underlying Assumptions about Behaviors

- Challenging behaviors are the result of unmet needs.
- Behavior is a way to communicate.
- All behavior has meaning, however, not all meaning is always clear. *Misbehavior is not always misbehavior.*



Strategies for Caregivers

- **#1: Take your own pulse**
 - Find your calm.
 - While it is natural to be upset when your student is upset, we cannot help in that state.
 - Practice your own regulation and self-care and model usage to your children.
- **#2: Routines**
 - Routines provide increased comfort and are even more important during times of stress.
 - Routines are one of the best tools for combatting anxiety and worry.
 - Examples: hygiene routines, start/end of day routines, transition routines, start/end of academic week routines, mealtime routines, entertainment routines, and Break routines
- **#3: Structure**
 - Structuring your child's day ahead of time is a highly effective way to help reduce anxiety associated with ambiguity. This is even more important when changes beyond our control continue to shift each day. Structure provides the child with a sense of boundary and control.
 - Daily schedules:
 - Schedules need to be readily accessible, visible, and understandable for all.
 - Review at the beginning of the day, check regularly, and do not deviate.
 - Expectations for the day
 - Start and end times for each task/activity
 - Academic and task completion lists
 - Visuals: help to support understanding and bypass stress related executive functioning barriers.
- **#4: Validation**
 - Avoid toxic positivity. It is natural for us to want to reframe and refocus on the positive, however doing so without truly hearing what your child

is communicating can invalidate their feelings and exacerbate feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation.

- Acknowledge that things are not fair, that we are all experiencing challenges, and that things are difficult.
- Validate all emotions, thoughts, and experiences.



Resources

- SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990
- SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline texting TalkWithUS to 66746
- The Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK
- Make a list of your own local resources (Hot lines, Warm lines, Crisis Response)