



WHAT HELPS KIDS EXPOSED TO TRAUMA?

Several treatments have now been scientifically tested and shown to be helpful for children and adolescents who have been exposed to traumatic events.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapies; such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) and Abuse-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT) and others help address the unique needs of children who may be showing serious symptoms from what they have experienced, especially symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety and some acting out behavior problems.

TF-CBT is a short-term treatment (about 18 sessions) and includes sessions for both the child or adolescent and their caregiver as well as several sessions with the child and caregiver together. Over 80% of children will show improvement with this treatment. Some of the things this approach includes which research has shown to be effective are:

- Teaching personal stress management and relaxation skills to deal with unpleasant emotional and physical feelings.
- Using techniques to talk directly about the traumatic event and their feelings about it in a way that doesn't distress the child.
- Creating a "narrative" or story about what happened. While it may be a difficult process for children to get to where they can share what happened to them, when they are able to do so with support, telling their story helps them to master painful feelings about the traumatic event and cope better with its impact on their lives.
- Correcting untrue or unhelpful ideas about what happened and why. Children sometimes think something they did or didn't do caused the trauma. This is rarely true, and some education and going over the story of what happened helps a child reduce the traumatic stress that can come from blaming or punishing themselves.
- Changing unhealthy and wrong views that may have developed as a result of the trauma. This might include ideas such as, "if this bad thing happened to me it must be because I'm bad", or "kids like me will never have a normal life again".
- Involving parent/caregivers. No one has more influence over a child than a parent. Parents and caregivers can play a crucial role in treatment, sometime by participating in treatment activities or helping the child to "practice" skills at home. Parents and caregivers also have important information about their child that therapists need to be able to provide better, more individualized treatment for children. Perhaps most importantly, parents and caregivers can create a safe, stable, consistent and caring environment that supports healing.

Another factor that effects a child's experience and reaction to trauma is when it is combined with other challenges or problems that have happened in the child's life such as physical or mental health problems, social and family problems, grief and loss, school problems, substance abuse or a history of other past traumas. Children coping with a history of these problems may need additional or on-going treatments or community supports and services to help heal with their feelings and resolve traumatic stress.