

Welcome  
We are glad you are here!  
We will get started in just a minute



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Understanding Emotions and Behavior of  
Infants and Toddlers  
Part II: Understanding Traumatic Stress in  
Infants and Toddlers



Linda Perez  
Psychologist and Professor of  
Education, Mills College

Julie Nicholson  
Deputy Director, Center for Child  
and Family Studies, WestEd



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Welcome  
Practice using the chat area

Please type in an introduction with your name and location.

Sent to: All Participants



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Time to pause and reflect

### Quick Write:

During a quick write feedback, questions and comments are welcomed in the text chat area.



→ Type in the chat area.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Introductions



Linda Perez  
Psychologist and Professor of Education,  
Mills College



Julie Nicholson  
Deputy Director, WestEd Center for Child  
and Family Studies  
Associate Professor of Practice, Mills  
College



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Poll



Please choose the category below that best fits your current role:

- Administrator/Director
- Infant/Toddler Teacher
- Trainer/Educator
- College Student
- Other



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Why discuss traumatic stress in young children?

- Not to position children through deficit or diagnose them.
- Increase our awareness and understanding
- Build empathy and our ability to be responsive and support their healing and resiliency



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Purpose of Today's Session

- Define early childhood trauma.
- Describe how traumatic stress disrupts young children's development.
- Discuss developmentally supportive practice and trauma sensitive care for infants and toddlers.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Poll



Please choose the statement below that best fits your level of prior knowledge on the topic of traumatic stress and its impact on young children.

1. This is a **new topic** for me.
2. I have a **beginning** understanding.
3. I have an **in depth** understanding.

Use the chat box to tell us about any books you have read or previous trainings you have attended on this topic.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Defining Trauma

*Any event that undermines a child's sense of physical or emotional safety or poses a threat to the safety of the child's parents or caregivers.*

- Trauma is defined by its effect on a particular individual's nervous system, not on the intensity of the circumstance itself.
- The younger the child, the more likely she is to be overwhelmed by common occurrences that might not affect an older child or adult.
- Different levels of trauma: acute and complex forms.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Elements of a Traumatic Experience

A complete loss of control and a sense of utter powerlessness.

Therefore, **regaining control** is an important aspect of coping with traumatic stress and helping the child return to a **situation that is predictable and safe.**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Contributors of Traumatic Stress

- Child maltreatment: Neglect, Emotional abuse, Physical abuse, Sexual abuse
- Poverty/homelessness
- Parental substance abuse or mental illness
- Exposure to violence or witnessing violence
  
- Falls, accidents and other childhood injuries
- Illness, invasive medical/surgical procedures, hospitalization
- Grief and loss
- Preterm birth



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Prevalence of Maltreatment

More than 700,000 children are victims of maltreatment in the US annually, primarily from their parents (78%).

Neglect is the most common (80%), followed by physical abuse (18%), and sexual abuse (9%), and some endure more than one form of maltreatment.

Infants in their first year of life are the most vulnerable with the highest rate of victimization, 2.5% in the national population of the same age.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Quick Write



How might traumatic stress impact the infants and toddlers in your care?



→ Type in the chat area.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Risk Factors for Vulnerability Perry, 1999

Event	Individual	Family/Social
Multiple or repeated events	Female	Overwhelmed families
Physical injury to the child	Age (younger more vulnerable)	Distant caregivers
Perpetrator is a family member	History of previous exposure to trauma	Absent caregivers
Physical injury to loved one, especially mother		Homelessness
Long duration		Substance abuse and/or parental mental illness



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Vulnerable Brain

A vulnerable brain has elevated stress hormones that can:

- result in fewer connections that the brain makes and keeps.
- shrink parts of the brain involved in learning and memory.
- diminish levels of mood enhancing neurotransmitters (serotonin and noradrenaline).



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Children mobilize the fight/flight and freeze nervous system when they feel danger or threat

Fight Flight Freeze



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Symptoms Suggestive of Infants' and Toddlers' Fight/Flight Response

- Startles
- Irritability and difficulty to soothe
- More acute and increased episodes of anxiety and clinging
- Separation distress
- Difficulty eating and sleeping



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Symptoms Suggestive of Infants' and Toddlers' Freezing Response

- Social withdrawal, numbing, freezing, retreating (dissociating)
- Becoming sensitized and distressed with reminders of the trauma
- Decrease in the capacity for pleasure
- Disruptions in vocalization
- Constriction in play




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Arousal System

Relationship between environmental stimuli and the arousal system.

- The amount of stimuli that moves children above their threshold where they become hyper-reactive (fight/flight).
- Or, below their threshold where they become hypo-reactive (freeze).




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Triggers that Affect Arousal States

A new child or adult	Quick movements	Disorganized materials
A stranger entering the space	Unexpected touch	Unpredictable schedule
Noise level	Harsh touch	The absence of caregiver
A smell	Another child crying	A particular texture
An unexpected noise	Someone taking something away	Taking the child's shoes off while they are lying down
Change in lighting Change in schedule	New room arrangement New piece of equipment	Someone approaching while the child is lying on a cot
Too many transitions	Nap time	Tickling a child
Harsh words or tone of voice	Someone approaching the child too quickly	
Angry or fearful facial expression	An adult towering over a child	




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Strategies for Calming Infants and Toddlers Stress Response Systems

Visual	Auditory	Tactile
Dimming the lights Reducing clutter on walls Providing small enclosures where toddlers can hide	Eliminate low frequency sounds Humming or singing Increase vocals/female voices to support relaxation Playing instrumental music Playing white noise Playing nature sounds	Patting or rubbing the back Providing textured blankets Swaddling Water or sensory table
Vestibular	Natural Outdoor Environments	
Rocking Swinging Bouncing Swaying Riding in a Stroller Taking a walk with adult Pushing the wall	Healing effects documented in research Rich sensory input Loose parts Wonder and creativity	




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Quick Write



How can care teachers build infants' and toddlers' capacity for resilience?



→ Type in the chat area.




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Neuroplasticity and Resilience

When communities and families strengthen these factors, they optimize resilience for children:

- Providing supportive adult-child relationships;
- Scaffolding learning so the child builds a sense of self-efficacy and control;
- Helping strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and
- Using faith and cultural traditions as a foundation for hope and stability.

Center on the Developing Child. (2015). *The Science of Resilience*. Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Attachment Relationship

The attachment relationship plays a central role in how children cope with stress and trauma.

Secure attachments buffer children from high stress and are critical for building the capacity for resilience and emotion regulation.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Infants and toddlers who have experienced trauma need caring and responsive adults who will create environments that are:



- Safe
- Stable
- Predictable
- Developmentally appropriate

And...

- Support their emotional regulation

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Case Analysis

A one year old child (Tasha) who experienced a three day hospital stay due to an asthma attack is resisting touch and reacting to loud noises by crying.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Quick Write**

How could you support Tasha to feel safe in her environment?



→ Type in the chat area.




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Secondary Traumatic Stress for Caregivers**

Professionals who work directly with children who have experienced trauma and traumatic stress are at risk for secondary traumatic stress.

**Prevention Strategies**

- Education and professional development
- Reflective supervision
- Mindfulness training
- Good nutrition
- Self care
  - Yoga
  - Exercise
  - Meditation




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Resources on Trauma**

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. Look at their resource library on the following topics:

- Brain architecture
- Impact of toxic stress, science of neglect
- Science of resilience

YouTube videos

- Bruce Perry: Trauma, Brain and Relationship: Helping Children Heal
- Nadine Burke Harris: How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <http://www.nctsn.org/>

Barbara Sorrels (2015). *Reaching and teaching children exposed to trauma*. Gryphon House, Inc.




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Quick Write



### Reflect

What is one thing you heard today that you will apply to your work?



→ Type in the chat area.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Following this Webinar:

- Evaluation Survey  
Your input is very important to us. You will receive an email to complete your webinar evaluation survey.
- This webinar will be archived on:  
[https://www.pitc.org/pub/pitc\\_docs/webinars.html](https://www.pitc.org/pub/pitc_docs/webinars.html)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Thank You!



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---