

# Trauma, Violence, and Its Effects on Children in our Community

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# What is childhood trauma?



- Experiences where there is a threat to the life or the physical well-being of a child
  - The threat may be real or perceived as real by a child
- Experiences where children witness violence and fear for the lives or safety of another individual
- Children often have strong emotions and physical reactions to these violent and dangerous experiences (e.g., terror, fear, helplessness, heart pounding, vomiting)
  - Fight, flight, freeze response

# What experiences might be traumatic?



- Bullying
- Automobile accidents or other serious accidents
- Serious accidents or life-threatening illnesses
- Community violence
- Natural or technological disasters or terrorism
- Refugee and war experiences
- Sudden or violent death of a loved one
- Exposure to intimate partner violence
- **Childhood abuse and neglect**



# Different types of abuse and neglect



- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional/psychological abuse
- Neglect
- Exposure to intimate partner (domestic) violence
  
- In Ontario in 2013, the investigations substantiated by child welfare agencies were primarily for exposure to intimate partner violence (48%), then neglect (24%), physical abuse (13%), emotional abuse (13%), and sexual abuse (2%)



# How would I know if a child is in need of help or protection?

What is their physical appearance?

How are they behaving?

What are they saying?

How are they interacting with peers, adults, caregivers?





# **What do the effects of childhood trauma look like?**



# Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



- Re-experiencing the traumatic event
- Intense reactions to trauma reminders
- Avoidance of thoughts, feelings, places, and people associated with the trauma
- Negative changes in thoughts and mood
- Increased arousal



# Complex Developmental Trauma







# What can I do to help a child who has experienced trauma?

## *Trauma-sensitive responses*

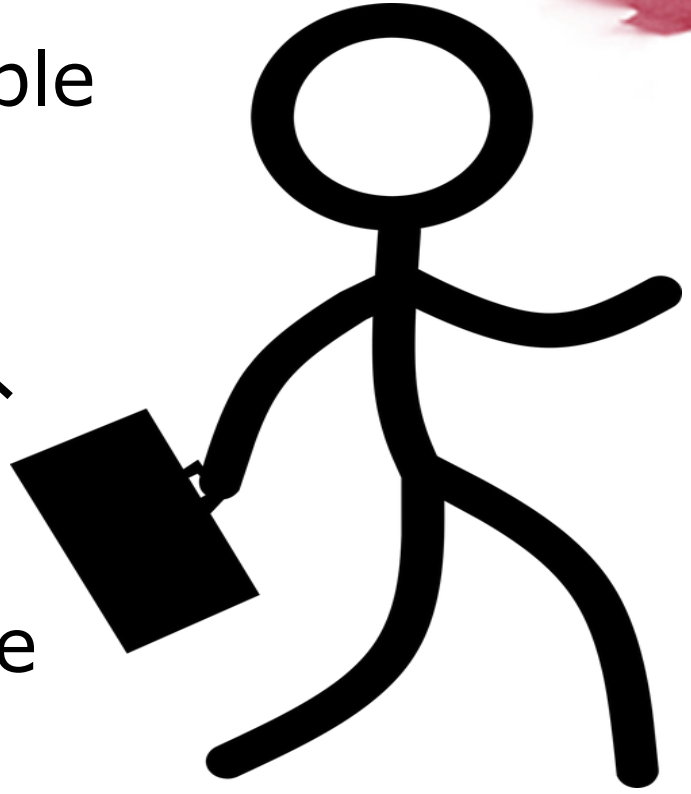




I will get hurt  
You will hurt me  
I am bad, worthless, unlovable  
You will reject me  
I am powerless, helpless




These beliefs will impact the way children feel, behave, and interact with others



# So now that I know about the invisible suitcase ....



- Create **safety** (physical, emotional)
  - Be consistent, predictable, and dependable
  - Monitor and act on safety concerns
- Focus on your relationship (**attachment**)
  - Understand challenging behaviour through a trauma lens and respond accordingly
  - Compassion, empathy (label feelings), and emotion regulation/problem-solving strategies instead of punishment-based strategies (consequences)

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- Help the child with **self-regulation**
    - Stay close, validate feelings, help identify what is going on for the child, problem-solve together
  - Create opportunities for success (**competence**)
  - Help the child build **connections**
  - **Support** the child and family
    - Help secure mental health resources
  - Understand and manage your **own reactions**

## Resources (Books)

- Faber, A., & Mazlich, E. (2012). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*. NY: Scribner
- Gottman, J. (1998). *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting*. NY: Simon & Schuster
- Siegel, D., & Bryson, T. P. (2012). *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. NY: Mind Your Brain Inc. and Bryson Creative Productions Inc

# Resources (Websites)



- Canadian Centre for Child Protection ([www.protectchildren.ca/app/en/training](http://www.protectchildren.ca/app/en/training))
- Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal ([www.cecw-cepb.ca](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca))
- Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway ([www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov))
- Encyclopedia on Child Development (<http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/>)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network ([www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org))
- Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families ([www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org))



**Thank you**



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