

# What Is Trauma?

Trauma is an emotional response to an intense event that threatens or causes harm. The harm can be physical or emotional, real or perceived, and it can threaten the child or someone close to him or her. Trauma can be the result of a single event, or it can result from exposure to multiple events over time.

## Effects of Trauma on Children

Trauma may have an affect upon...	...in the following ways
a child's body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• inability to control physical responses to stress</li><li>• chronic illness, even into adulthood (heart disease, obesity)</li></ul>
a child's brain (thinking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• difficulty thinking, learning, and concentrating</li><li>• impaired memory</li><li>• difficulty switching from one thought or activity to another</li></ul>
a child's emotions (feelings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• low self-esteem</li><li>• feeling unsafe</li><li>• inability to regulate emotions</li><li>• difficulty forming attachments to caregivers</li><li>• troubles with friendships</li><li>• trust issues</li><li>• depression, anxiety</li></ul>
a child's behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• lack of impulse control</li><li>• fighting, aggression, running away</li><li>• substance abuse</li><li>• suicide</li></ul>

source: [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov)

## Signs of Trauma in Children of Different Ages

young children ages 0 to 5	school-age children ages 6 to 12	teenagers ages 13 to 18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• irritability, 'fussiness'</li> <li>• startling easily or being difficult to calm</li> <li>• frequent tantrums</li> <li>• clinginess, reluctance to explore the world</li> <li>• activity levels that are much higher or lower than peers</li> <li>• repeating traumatic events over and over in dramatic play or conversations</li> <li>• delays in reaching physical, language or other milestones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty paying attention</li> <li>• being quiet or withdrawn</li> <li>• frequent tears or sadness</li> <li>• talking often about scary feelings and ideas</li> <li>• difficulty transitioning from one activity to the next</li> <li>• fighting with peers or adults</li> <li>• changes in school performance</li> <li>• wanting to be left alone</li> <li>• eating much less or more than peers</li> <li>• getting into trouble at school or home</li> <li>• frequent headaches or stomach aches with no apparent cause</li> <li>• behaviour common to younger children (thumb sucking, bed wetting, fear of the dark)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talking about the trauma constantly or denying that it happened</li> <li>• refusal to follow rules, or talking back frequently</li> <li>• being tired all the time, sleeping much more (or less) than peers, nightmares</li> <li>• risky behaviours</li> <li>• fighting</li> <li>• not wanting to spend time with friends</li> <li>• using drugs or alcohol, running away from home, or getting into trouble with the law</li> </ul>

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