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One out of four children experience one or more traumatic experiences which can have a lifelong impact. Research has shown that love, care, and support from a trusted adult can make a difference in how children process and handle those experiences. This toolkit is designed to support and equip parents in this role. The resources provided in this guide can be helpful for all children and parents in helping them to manage stress in healthy ways which foster attachment.
Responses to Traumatic Experiences, Age by Age

Every child’s response to traumatic experiences is unique, but these experiences affect one’s whole body and entire emotional world. Here are some things to watch for. At any age, children may:

- seek or demand more attention,
- show aggression,
- seem withdrawn,
- startle easily,
- have sleep problems,
- have separation anxiety or show fear of certain adults,
- cry for reasons adults can’t figure out,
- show regressive behaviors (such as wetting the bed after being potty trained),
- show increased irritability, and
- display sadness.

Birth to 2

Infants and toddlers may:

- have digestive problems and low appetite and weight,
- possess weaker verbal skills and more memory problems than older children, and
- have exaggerated emotional responses (such as screaming or crying).

Ages 3–6

Young children may:

- have difficulty focusing in school,
- have delays with certain skills or demonstrate learning disabilities,
- act out with anger in social situations,
- become anxious or fearful,
- have “thoughts that won’t stop”,
- develop low self-confidence or feelings of mistrust toward others,
- have stomachaches and/or headaches, and
- “act out” the trauma in play, drawing, or speaking.
The Big Idea: By recognizing signs of stress, you can help children after upsetting and confusing events.

**Watching for Signs of Stress**

💬 Offering Comfort  🌐 Age 0 to 6  ⏰ 4-10 Min

During tough times, when there is a lot of change and uncertainty, children may just not be themselves. Just like grown-ups, kids experience stress. If changes in their behavior continue or affect their everyday life, it might be time to reach out for help. Here are some common reactions to stress and helpful ways parents can respond:

- If children are super-clingy or scared of being alone, use gentle words to reassure them that you’ll keep them safe and you will not disappear. Little ones feel comforted and safe when there are things they can count on each day. Try to create at least one daily routine that will stay the same no matter what, like reading a bedtime story or having an afternoon snack together.

- If children have trouble sleeping, offer a comfort object, like a stuffed animal or special blanket, to help them soothe themselves and calm down. Say, for instance, “Blankie will keep you company all night, and I will see you when you wake up in the morning.”

- If children are talking less or shying away from social situations, they may be keeping lots of big feelings inside. Ask how they are feeling and if they have questions. Give them words describing feelings, such as angry, sad, scared, or worried.

- More frequent meltdowns can be kids’ way of coping with a lack of control over a situation. Try activities that help them feel calmer and in control of something, such as molding clay, doing a puzzle, or building with blocks.

- If bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, or baby talk are reappearing, try to offer love and affection, and understand that these are normal behaviors in stressful times, and it can take time for them to get better.
The Big Idea: Kids need to hear that it’s okay to have big, confusing, and even scary feelings.

Little Children, Big Feelings

💬 Coping With Incarceration ⏰ Age 2 to 6 ⏰ 4-10 Min

Children’s feelings come in all shapes and sizes. Look for signs that children are struggling with big feelings like stress, fear, shame, anger, sadness, and frustration:

- Sudden yelling or crying
- Difficulty sleeping
- Unusual clinging
- Hitting
- Eating more or eating less than usual
- Smiling or laughing less often
- Having new fears
- Bed wetting

Help children to open up about their feelings by:

- Reminding them that all feelings are okay
- Sharing some of your own feelings with them
- Naming the emotions (“It looks like you might be feeling sad/scared/lonely…”)

It can be difficult for children to talk about feelings in the middle of a challenging moment. Try these strategies:

- Ask kids to stop what they are doing, put their hands on their tummies, and slowly take three deep breaths.
- Pause to blow up a “calm-down balloon.” Hand them a pretend balloon and ask them to “fill” it with big breaths. Then they can pretend to “release” it into the air.
- Ask them to take a break to smell a pretend a birthday cake and blow out the candles. This will help them with calming breaths in through the nose, out through the mouth. Try it together!
**H Is for Hope**

**Traumatic Experiences**  **Age 0 to 6**  **1-4 Min**

For both kids and grown-ups, hope can be a powerful tool in healing from trauma. Having hope—and keeping it in the face of challenges—is a great coping strategy.

**When we have hope, we:**
- know what we want;
- believe in our ability to get there; and
- stay motivated to remain on the path toward our goal.

**Hope is a way for getting through tough times and it’s a way to focus on a specific goal. Also:**
- Hope helps you show up for the hard work needed to reach a goal (the “will and the way”).
- Hope feels good, and its good for your health. Anyone can learn it, and anyone can benefit from it.
- Hope can develop through good relationships.
- Hope allows a person to reach out for help, information, and support.

**To help kids build a sense of hope, try saying:**
- What would you like to be able to do? I’ll help you do it.
- What is something you’ve learned in the past?
- You can find a way to figure things out.
- Everyone is always learning (both kids and grown-ups!).
- You have people who love you and whom you can count on.
- Things are always changing. Big feelings come and go. It’s easier to have hope if you remember that you won’t always feel this way.
- You know some ways to help yourself, and you can learn more ways.

**For yourself, remember:**
- Reaching out and asking others for help is a hopeful act. No one has to be alone.
- Even goals that seem big can be reached with lots of small steps.
- People can keep their hope even when the worst things happen.
- You can change your own brain and train it in new ways.
- No one can take away your sense of hope.
- You can be afraid or doubtful and hopeful at the same time.
- Think about someone who “beat the odds” to succeed. How do you think that person remained hopeful?
I Hear You!

Kids and grown-ups can ask and answer questions to get to know each other:
• What made you smile today?
• If you could go anywhere right now, where would you go?
• What is something important about you that I may not know already?

For more resources, go to SesameStreetInCommunities.org
In order to help keep your child calm and regulated, it is important that you, the parent, are able to keep yourself calm—especially when your child's behavior is challenging or out of control. Engaging in breathing and movement activities helps to use breath to focus attention and calm yourself. The goal is to learn techniques that you can later use when help is needed to regulate your emotions or behaviors. The more you practice, the easier it will be to call on these resources during uncomfortable or overwhelming situations.

**Deep Belly Breathing**

1. Begin lying on your back on a flat surface, head supported by a pillow (optional). Bend your knees (you can place another pillow under your knees for support if you want) and place one hand on your belly and another on your chest to feel your diaphragm as you breathe.
2. Now breathe in slowly through your nose, feeling your stomach push against your hand as air fills the deepest point in your lungs. Note that your chest should remain as still as possible.
3. Exhale through your lips while tightening your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward.
4. Repeat for a total of 5 to 10 minutes every day. Aim for 3 to 4 times a day for maximum benefits.

Experiment with different breathing patterns. Once you’ve gotten comfortable with abdominal breathing, practice different patterns, rates, and depths of breathing. Different types of abdominal breathing can slow down a stressed nervous system or even stimulate anti-inflammatory responses in your immune system.

Some techniques include breathing out for twice as long as you breath in. For example, you might breathe in for 5 counts, and breathe out for 10 counts. This will slow your heart rate and signal your nervous system to go into relaxation mode.
Feeling Anxious? Overwhelmed? Can’t Focus?

1. Press your feet firmly into the floor.
2. Try to feel your heel, your arch, and each of your toes against the floor.
3. Imagine roots are grounding you into the surface.
4. Take a deep breath into your belly.
5. Imagine the air is going all the way down to your feet.

For more information on skills to take on life’s challenges, visit transylvaniacares.org

C.A.R.E.
Transylvania Opioid Response Team
Electronic Resources

Spotify Playlist

Step 1: Download Spotify for free!
Step 2: Type “Soothing Music for Families” by GetSet Toolkits into the search bar.
Step 3: Hit “Play” and start to relax with your family!

Downloadable Book

Downloadable Book Link:
http://piploproductions.com/stories/once/

Guided Meditation for Kids

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7j_Na4Baoaw

Guided Meditation for Adults

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCorELKFQE
Comfy, Cozy Blankies: Sewing Seeds of Love

Every child needs to be “comfy and cozy.” To this end, many community groups and individuals have made "comfy, cozy blankies" that children can carry at times when they need to be comforted. The blanket's purpose is to provide comfort during times of anxiety.

Of course, a parent’s presence, attention and care provides the best comfort! You might let your child know that their “blankie” might also help when things seem overwhelming--perhaps when entering new situations, joining a preschool, visiting a doctor, riding a long distance in a car, or dealing with an illness or change of any kind. Having a favorite object like a blanket or stuffed animal may help a child to cope with new or stressful situations.

Each comfy, cozy blankie is unique and was made by the many seamstresses that dedicated their time, materials, and energy toward this project. Over 45 individual seamstresses and 8 quilters groups have been involved in the effort. We give a big “THANK YOU” to the following groups and individuals who have been invested in this project with the sewing of over 750 blankies: WNC Quilters, Sew Blessed Ministry, Loose Threads, Linus Project, 4-H Sewing Group, Saturday Stitchers, Cooperative Extension, First United Methodist Church Women, Silvermont Knitters, Cathey's Creek Crafty Ladies as well as individuals, Lucille Chaveas, Jo Barnes, Valerie Pangle, Marcy Thompson, Gail Edmonds, Pam Watson, Eleanor Mockridge, Cary and Tonya Hitchcock, and various friends from Tennessee, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Texas.
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