



# Tips for Tots



## Tip #4: Trauma and Resiliency in Young Children

## Strategies

Did you know?

### Infant/Toddler:

Infants and toddlers need help and comfort to respond to the confusion of a traumatic event such as removal from their home, loss of a parent or witnessing violence. They may signal their distress through irritability, difficulties sleeping, excessive crying, and clinging. From the emerging science of early brain development, we now know that children this age have critical needs for emotional safety and close interpersonal connections which can be deeply affected by traumatic events. If the adults in their world focus on restoring a sense of predictable safety & consistent, comforting relationships as quickly as possible, children will have the best chance of resuming healthy development & developing a secure attachment.

### Preschool:

Preschoolers may react to traumatic events in a variety of ways; some may exhibit challenging, defiant behaviors, while others may withdraw or appear lethargic. Preschoolers who are beginning to learn to soothe themselves are likely to return to younger, less mature responses like whining and demanding attention. These are signs of the child's need for a close, comforting relationship with an adult, to help restore their emotional balance, which has been disrupted by the trauma. Adults can work to respond in an empathic manner to this need for connection while still continuing to set clear limits and providing a very predictable environment.

### Infant/Toddler:

- Infants and toddlers need extra physical contact from adults to help them feel safe and secure. Rather than encouraging children to be independent, allow the child as much cuddling and comfort as is possible. This will help them to feel secure enough to begin to explore any new surroundings.
- Be sure to avoid multiple placements for babies. This is critical in building their resilience.
- Make the child's world as familiar to the child as possible, maintain regular schedules & consistent daily routines. This will help the child to feel safe and secure.
- Work to have items from the child's home, including pictures of biological parents, stuffed animals, blankets and other comfort objects. Make these available throughout the day.
- Self-soothing is an important skill for children to learn. It is important adults support the child in developing these by providing comfort items, singing, rocking, slow breathing, etc.
- Take your cues from the child as to when to comfort and when to stand back but make sure that the child knows that you are nearby and wanting to help when they are ready.

### Preschool:

- Older children may exhibit more physical behavior such as hitting, spitting or throwing items. Work to acknowledge the related feelings- for ex.: "You are really angry right now!"- While staying close, providing limits & keeping them safe.
- Limit transitions & changes in caregivers and environments as much as possible. Try to maintain their childcare setting.
- Allow the child to have familiar comfort items close by such as a family picture, stuffed toy or favorite book.
- If play becomes loud or repetitive know that children work out difficult emotions/trauma through play. Allow it within reason.
- Practice relaxation techniques with children, such as blowing up like a balloon in order to practice breathing & calming.
- Know the child's triggers related to the trauma. Use redirection or soothing strategies if emotions become too powerful. Maintain former rituals & create new ones for difficult times.
- Answer any questions related to the trauma event in an age appropriate, simple and honest manner.
- A network of caring adults can provide the sense of safety. Tell the child often about all the people that care about him.

### Resources:

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) - <http://www.nctsn.org>  
Zero to Three: The Impact of Trauma - <http://www.zerotothree.org/maltreatment/trauma/trauma.html>

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