

Appendix 3

Developmental Trauma – adapted from: Hickie, K (2020). *A Brief Introduction to Trauma Informed Practice*. University of Sussex.

Children who are exposed to multiple, or chronic, abuse and neglect experiences early in life may show signs of *developmental trauma* resulting in a wide range of difficulties in their functioning. Common trauma responses/difficulties associated with developmental trauma include: sensory processing difficulties; sleep disturbances; emotional and behavioural regulation problems; poor impulse control; difficulties forming attachments and healthy relationships, poor self-esteem, cognitive problems, difficulties paying attention; poor capacity to identify danger/safety and so putting their own safety at risk; self-harm; dissociation ('checking out', feeling numb and detached from themselves and their surroundings). As traumatised children and young people go through life, their capacity to respond to new stressors and challenging events is often reduced.

All of these responses can be easily misinterpreted by professionals around the child as behaviour that is naughty, out of control, wilfully risk seeking, emotionally cold, or manipulative.

Helping a child's recovery

Caring for a child with developmental trauma is a very complex and challenging task. The children have embedded ways to survive in the world which were necessary when exposed to abuse and neglect but become problematic for them when they are removed from that environment. These behaviours can be very resistant to change and there is a high risk of burn out and vicarious trauma for those caring for them but with the right care, these children can be helped to function in more adaptive ways. Guidance from trauma experts regarding caring for these children include: carer self-care; support around the carer; having a good understanding of developmental trauma and how this relates to the child; skills in emotional regulation and calming the brainstem; stepping back and reflecting before reacting; seeing the child's behaviour as a communication and helping the child understand their behaviours better; finding the right balance between nurture and structure; modelling different ways of responding, including repairing ruptures in the relationship with the child.

[Developmental-Trauma-Close-Up-Revised-Jan-2020.pdf \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](https://www.beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Developmental-Trauma-Close-Up-Revised-Jan-2020.pdf)

[CHILDHOOD-TRAUMA-AND-THE-BRAIN-SinglePages.pdf \(uktraumacouncil.link\)](https://www.uktraumacouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CHILDHOOD-TRAUMA-AND-THE-BRAIN-SinglePages.pdf)

<https://uktraumacouncil.org/resources/childhood-trauma-and-the-brain> video clips