



March 2025

## Trauma-Informed Care Series Responding to Trauma and the Effects on the Brain in Children and Youth – Part Two

In Part One of *Trauma and the Effects on the Brain in Children and Youth* we learned that children who experience trauma are at particular risk because their rapidly developing brains are very vulnerable. Early childhood trauma has been associated with changes to developing areas of the brain. Lower parts of the brain control basic functions like respiration, heart rate and blood pressure. Upper areas of the brain are responsible for many complex functions including memory, attention, perceptual awareness, thinking, language, and consciousness. Changes in the upper regions may affect IQ and the ability to regulate emotions, and the child or youth may become more fearful and may not feel as safe or as protected.

Not all children and youth are affected in the same way, nor to the same degree. Children, youth, and families can possess skills and “competencies, psychological resources, and resilience--often even in the face of significant trauma--that can protect them from long-term harm. Research on resilience in children demonstrates that an essential protective factor is the reliable presence of a positive, caring, and protective parent or caregiver, who can help shield children against adverse experiences.”<sup>1</sup>

### SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

Dr. Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us how to help children learn, think, and reflect.

### Trauma-Informed Support for Children<sup>2</sup>



#### **Create Safety**

If the child is overwhelmed perhaps guide them to a quiet corner and give them the space, they need to calm themselves. They need to feel comfortable with a trusted adult who they know has their welfare at the forefront of their mind.



#### **Regulate the nervous system**

Stress brings a pattern of psychological responses: hyper-arousal (jumpy, agitated, explosive) or hypo-arousal (depressed, withdrawn, frozen). The child needs to explore strategies to find what helps them to find calm.

<sup>1</sup> National Child Traumatic Stress Network, [How Early Childhood Trauma is Unique.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Videos of Bruce Perry](#)



## **Connect**

This is the most effective way to calm the nervous system. When we are around people we care about & trust, our bodies produce oxytocin, the hormone responsible for calming our nervous system after stress.



## **Support a coherent narrative**

Structure, routine, and a reliable calm adult helps reduce the chaos and supports the child to create logical sequential connections that help them understand their own narrative. They need to hear a simple explanation of what is happening and what will happen next.



## **Practice power-with strategies**

Trauma comes with a loss of power and control. When someone/thing wields power over you with disregard for your feelings or thoughts it triggers toxic stress, bringing back previous traumas. Maintain dignity and respect for the child and be with them without dominating them.



## **Build skills of social & emotional resilience**

When the brain is preoccupied with survival it does not devote energy to building and developing relationships. Model the skills and actions of a caring, kind, and supportive person for them to observe, copy, and practice so they become more skilled.



## **Foster post-traumatic growth**

We know that there are qualities that allow people not just to survive trauma, but to find new meaning and purpose. Problem solving, planning, and maintaining focus despite discomfort, self-control, emotional regulation, and seeking support are skills that enable this.

DCY Trauma-informed early care and education programs play a crucial role and can help prevent developmental delays or disabilities. By implementing trauma-informed care in early care and education, these programs can improve the chances that young children who have experienced trauma can recover, thrive, and enter kindergarten ready to learn, a major goal and focus of DCY.

## **Trauma-Informed Support for Youth<sup>3</sup>**

For kids experiencing severe trauma or health-threatening responses, it's important for parents and caregivers to seek out help by contacting a mental health professional. But all parents,

<sup>3</sup> Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 2023. *Understanding Childhood Trauma: Ways to Support Young People*

caregivers, families, and teachers can use the following building blocks to ensure kids feel they have a safe place to share their worries, anxieties, and feelings.



### ***Check in and provide safety and consistency***

Consistently checking in with young people is key to having a general read on how they're doing. Adults providing and reinforcing that young people are safe is the foundation to helping them. Be open, honest, and direct about what they've experienced and reaffirm that they are safe now.



### ***Connect and build trust***

Let kids know you're always available to talk with them. Ask open-ended questions and listen to how they are feeling. Don't try to minimize their experience or spin in a positive light. Here are some other [tips for building trust](#).



### ***Extend compassion and patience***

Give youth the time and space to process and share their feelings when they are ready and create healthy opportunities for them to do so. This includes things such as providing youth with journals for writing down their own thoughts; offering teens peer groups to discuss their feelings; expressing emotions and experiences through arts and crafts; and exercising to help relieve the body of stress.



### ***Be open to feedback***

As an adult in their life, sometimes you might be unintentionally exacerbating a young person's trauma, worry or stress. Be open to the conversation if it happens, even if it's hard to hear or comes as a surprise. If something you are doing is causing them harm, listen to their experience of it, validate their feelings and work together to find a common solution to change it.



### ***Know when and where to get help***

Remember, you are not alone. If your child needs more support, reach out to a medical health provider or counselor for next steps. By ensuring youth are safe, heard, valued, and supported, we can ensure they have the coping skills and resilience to thrive.

When children and youth experience trauma, their growth and development are disrupted. To heal and move forward, research shows that the brain must be stimulated in fresh, creative ways. More than ever, a child needs support from adults who can authentically and respectfully interact with them.

A Trauma-Informed approach acknowledges that understanding a child, youth, or family's life experience and how that may be impacting their current behaviors and functioning is key to potentially improving engagement and outcomes. In some cases, and where it's safe, helping families understand how to respond to behaviors and functioning, may help a child or youth remain at home and avoid out-of-home placement, a major goal and focus of DCY.



## RESOURCES

### 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Ohioans who are experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis and their family members can call, chat, or text 988 to reach a trained counselor who can offer help and support.

### Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services

- Crisis Text Line – Text 4Hope to 741 741 for free, confidential conversation  
[Crisis Text Line | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)
- OhioMHAS Learn and Find Help for a variety of resources on support prevention, treatment, and recovery.  
[Learn and Find Help | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)
- Resources  
[Resources | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(ohio.gov\)](#)

### Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY)

Team members at DCY are committed to making Ohio the best place to start and raise a family. The team is focused on helping all children live up to their full potential by providing developmentally appropriate services and resources from before they are born through adulthood. The mission is to promote positive, lifelong outcomes for Ohio youth through early intervention, quality education, and family support programs. Caregivers are essential to a child's healthy growth and development. Whether you are looking for child care options, parenting tips, or resources for a healthy pregnancy, resources are available for families of all shapes and sizes and can be found at: [For Families | Department of Children and Youth](#)

### **B.D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.**

Dr. Bruce Perry is the principal of the [Neurosequential Network](#) and a Professor (Adjunct) at the School of Allied Health, Human Services and Sport, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria Australia. Over the last thirty years, Dr. Perry has been an active teacher, clinician and researcher in children's mental health and the neurosciences holding a variety of academic positions. His work on the impact of abuse, neglect and trauma on the developing brain has impacted clinical practice, programs, and policy across the world. The Neurosequential



# TRAUMA INFORMED CARE SERIES

Network develops and disseminates innovative programs and practice to improve life for children, families, and communities. The Neurosequential Model is a developmentally sensitive, neurobiology-informed approach to clinical problem solving.

## **Trauma Research Foundation**

[Trauma Research Foundation](#) is a community of researchers and clinicians who are committed to developing innovative methods for the treatment of people of all ages who have experienced trauma. To carry out their mission, they perform scientific research that translates into innovative body-based treatment modalities that can be used to help people heal from the impacts of trauma. The Foundation's Mission is to support and grow a community of clinicians, researchers, educators, and people whose lives are affected by trauma, who collaborate to research, develop, disseminate, and implement optimal trauma treatments for children and adults.

## **Boys and Girls Clubs**

Boys and Girls Clubs provide a safe haven for youth, giving them an opportunity to discover their great futures. Within in the past decade, [examining childhood trauma](#) has come to the forefront of understanding how early experiences, health, and behaviors can impact adulthood. Read on to learn how to support kids through tough times.

## **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**

NAEYC, is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by [connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research](#). They advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. The association comprises nearly 60,000 individual members of the early childhood community and 52 affiliates, all committed to delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning. They work to achieve a collective vision: that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential