



## Trauma

### Lawns Park Primary School and Nursery **A Quick Guide to Childhood**

## What is Childhood Trauma?

Trauma refers to the way that some distressing event(s) are so extreme or intense that they overwhelm a pupil's ability to cope, resulting in lasting negative impact. Trauma can happen at any age and can cause long-lasting harm. When the event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent experience it poses a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity. This is particularly important for young children as their sense of safety depends on consistent and attuned care from their attachment figures (family/carers). Traumatic experiences can initiate strong emotions and physical reactions that can persist long after the event. Children may feel terror, helplessness, or fear, as well as physiological reactions such as heart pounding, vomiting, or loss of bowel or bladder control. Children who are unable to protect themselves or who lacked protection from others during the traumatic experience may also feel overwhelmed by the intensity of their physical and emotional responses.

It is important to note that each pupil will experience and respond to trauma or childhood adversities differently. Some examples of childhood trauma include:

- An accident, for example a car crash.
- Physical and Emotional neglect.
- Physical, Emotional and Sexual abuse.
- Domestic Violence.
- Substance Misuse.
- Mental ill health in the family.
- Parental divorce/separation/loss.
- Family member incarcerated.
- Oppression, displacement, migration.
- War or civil unrest.
- A life-threatening illness, injury, or painful medical procedure.
- Bullying/Cyberbullying.

## Implications for a pupil

How needs may present in the school environment:

- Hypervigilant; checking the environment for danger or threat.
- Flight responses; hiding/running away.
- Fight responses; arguing or hurting others.
- Freeze responses; appearing to 'shut down' or disconnect.
- Have difficulty forming relationships or seeking adult input and proximity.
- Struggling to concentrate or remember tasks.
- Fidgeting and restless.
- Needing additional help with change and transitions.
- Unstructured times such as break, and lunch times may be challenging. Pupils may not engage in activities appearing withdrawn or, fall out with peers due to lack of social skills.
- Wanting to be self-directed.
- Appearing self-reliant - not asking for help/support.
- Have difficulties managing emotions. For example, frequent emotional episodes, unexpected, heightened responses, or an inability to communicate emotions.
- Physical complaints such as stomach aches or nausea.
- Difficulty separating from their caregiver.
- Not wanting to go home.

## How to help – top tips

1. Where appropriate, let the pupil know that trauma happens and that it's OK to be upset, e.g., "Sometimes things happen that are really scary, and you keep feeling afraid for a long time afterwards".
2. Let the pupil know that the event was not their fault, e.g., "Things like [the traumatic event] can happen to anyone; it wasn't your fault".
3. Provide reassurance, e.g., "The important thing to remember is that you're safe now". "Any time you feel scared or upset about what happened, I'm here to help".
4. Encourage them to talk openly about how they have been feeling, and try to get an idea about any worries they may have or difficulties they are experiencing, e.g., "Is there anything about [the traumatic event] that you're especially worried about?"

5. Key adults in school to build positive trusting relationships. Take time to get to know the pupil and keep promises.
6. Create predictability through routines, timetables, and personnel.
7. Give pupils a sense of belonging. For example, greet each pupil, validate emotions/show empathy, listen to pupils, and give jobs/responsibilities.
8. Scaffold work tasks and use short, timed activities.
9. Spot clues to possible anxiety or fear and implement supportive strategies. For example, a pupil who finds loud/unexpected noises difficult can be supported by being in a quieter area of the classroom.
10. Ensure there is a 'safe space' in the classroom/school if required.
11. Incorporate regular, short sensory comforts such as physical breaks/activities or relaxation. These should be implemented when the pupil is calm to begin to gain positive associations.
12. Give positive choices to increase self-efficiency.
13. Help pupils understand emotions. This can be achieved in many ways. For example, by using scripts such as 'I think you're feeling XXXX' or 'I wonder if you are feeling XXXX'. Alternatively use characters in stories, famous/historical people, art, or music to begin to discuss feelings.
14. Regular 'check-in's' with key adults if the pupil seeks adult input or try implementing a peer buddy system for quieter pupils.
15. Be aware of key times of the year such as anniversaries, Mother's Day/Father's Day, birthdays, or Christmas. Approach these aspects sensitively, giving additional support, reassurance and providing alternative tasks where appropriate.
16. Keep the pupil 'in mind' – 'I'll be thinking of you'. This can be achieved by using the above script or sending a card/postcard with a similar message.

## Further advice and support

### **Useful Websites:**

[Recovery factsheets and booklets](#)

[Inner World Work](#)