

NCTSN  The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network



*Changing the course of children's lives
by changing the course of their care*

Established by Congress in 2000, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) brings a singular and comprehensive focus to childhood trauma. NCTSN's collaboration of frontline providers, researchers, and families is committed to raising the standard of care while increasing access to services. Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and dedication to evidence-based practices, the NCTSN changes the course of children's lives by changing the course of their care.

This project was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.

Writing/editing: Deborah A. Lott

Design: Sue Oh Design



Traumatic events are common in the lives of America's children.

A 16-year-old witnesses the shooting of her best friend in a random act of community violence.

A 12-year-old believes that he will be killed as he is beaten once again by his alcoholic stepfather.

Two terrified toddlers huddle together with their parents as a hurricane takes the roof off their house.

Every year millions of children and adolescents in the United States experience traumatic events. Some of these events are single occurrences. Others, such as abuse, neglect, and witnessing domestic violence, may be ever-present features of a child's life. A recent, nationally representative survey of 1400 American youths found that more than two thirds had experienced at least one significant traumatic event by the age of 16. More than one third reported exposure to multiple kinds of trauma.

Child traumatic stress is one of our most underrecognized public health problems.

Childhood traumas vary from physical and sexual abuse to community and domestic violence, life-threatening illness, natural disasters, and the sudden loss of parents, siblings, and other loved ones. Though children are resilient, they can also be profoundly affected by these experiences. With help, they can recover and thrive. Without it, trauma's effects can derail their childhoods and reverberate into adult life. Yet child traumatic stress remains one of our most underrecognized public health problems.

Many children suffer from traumatic stress.

In the aftermath of traumatic events, many children suffer from traumatic stress. They do not just forget and move on. Instead, they may become nervous, fearful, and easily startled. Images and feelings from the trauma repeat in their minds uncontrollably. They may have trouble sleeping or recurrent nightmares. Unable to concentrate or focus, they may begin to perform poorly in school. They feel distanced from their friends and lose interest in favorite activities. To avoid distressing physical and emotional reactions to reminders of the trauma, they withdraw even further from relationships and activities. As they struggle to make sense out of what has happened, they may feel responsible and blame themselves.



Childhood traumatic stress can derail a child's healthy development.

In the long run, childhood trauma may have far-reaching impacts, and can derail the course of healthy development. Traumatic stress can adversely affect a child's memory, attention, behavior, and emotional and social life. A growing body of research shows that traumatic stress can change the biology of the brain and nervous system. It can deplete a child's capacity to bear ordinary life stresses. It can even alter the structure of the developing brain.

Trauma, and the problems that often follow in its wake, can damage a child's trust in a safe world. Children who've experienced significant trauma often cannot imagine or plan for a positive future. An adolescent with a history of trauma may be unable to accurately gauge danger and so may be overly fearful, or not fearful enough, and indulge in high-risk behaviors.

“The training I received from the NCTSN helped me understand what was driving my foster child's behavior. For the first time, I understood it was not about me. Despite the challenges, I was able to keep this child in my home, and now we are in the process of adopting.”

RESOURCE PARENT



Ignoring childhood trauma carries a large societal cost.

Poverty, crime, low academic achievement, addiction, mental illness, and chronic disease all have roots in untreated childhood traumatic stress. Every year, billions of dollars are spent in the United States to address the serious consequences of ignoring this public health problem.



Shane Gousoy/Flickr/Getty Images

The effects of childhood trauma reach into adulthood.

Ongoing, large-scale studies have traced the legacy of untreated childhood trauma into adulthood. People with histories of childhood trauma, particularly severe or repeated trauma, are at higher risk of developing psychiatric disorders such as depression. They are more likely to abuse alcohol and other substances. Their bodies may respond abnormally to stress. Even the risk of chronic physical conditions, such as heart and lung disease, may be significantly increased.

“My therapist understood me and took in everything I was saying, and that helped me a lot. As I got older and went through different events in my life, I developed a strength I would not have had if I hadn’t received trauma services.”

YOUTH WHO RECEIVED TREATMENT FROM AN NCTSN CENTER



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Child traumatic stress is one of the most treatable mental health problems of childhood.

Despite its potentially serious consequences, childhood traumatic stress is one of the most treatable mental health problems of childhood. With rapid intervention, a child's life can be put back on track. Children who receive timely and appropriate treatment may not only recover, but gain the tools and capacity to cope more successfully with future stress. When helped to put what has happened to them into perspective, children are able to plan for their futures. Often they develop greater empathy for the suffering of others and a desire to help their communities and larger society.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) brings a singular and comprehensive focus to child trauma.

Comprised of grantee centers across the country and a coordinating center based at UCLA and Duke University, the NCTSN has raised the visibility of this public health problem and sparked new approaches to addressing child traumatic stress. This strong collaborative network brings together leading experts in the field, frontline providers, and families to increase the pace of advances in care and move scientific gains quickly into practice.





Milan Zeranski / The Agency Collection / Getty Images

Transforming Trauma Treatment

Since the launch of the NCTSN

- Hundreds of thousands of children have received effective, culturally sensitive, evidence-based assessment and treatment for child traumatic stress.
- Nearly a million providers have been trained in best practices.
- Family members and consumers have offered valuable input to ensure that treatment addresses the real needs of families and is responsive to their concerns.
- Data from more than 14,000 children treated by the NCTSN have provided an unprecedented portrait of child trauma in America; this information is used to improve care and shape national child policies.
- Innovative and engaging new learning models, such as the NCTSN Learning Collaborative, ensure that changes in practice take hold and are sustained in service agencies across the country.
- The NCTSN Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma has identified the most important principles of trauma treatment across theoretical models and disciplines. It has become a model in the field for innovative trauma education.

“The NCTSN has had a powerful influence on individual clinicians like me, particularly in small and rural communities. We can play an important role in influencing our entire community to adopt more trauma-informed approaches.”

NCTSN PROVIDER



Bringing A Trauma Perspective to the Systems that Serve Children

To reduce the effects of trauma on the lives of children, it is important to not only transform trauma assessment and treatment, but to bring a trauma perspective to every system and institution that serves children. The NCTSN is a catalyst for transformative systems change. It works directly with those systems – healthcare, juvenile justice, law enforcement, child welfare, education, foster care – that have the greatest impact on children’s lives. The NCTSN has created practical and effective tools to ensure that everyone who works closely with children recognizes the role of trauma and takes appropriate actions to help children recover.

Here are a few examples of NCTSN products and initiatives for systems change:

- **The Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit.** A comprehensive curriculum for child welfare workers.
- **Cops, Kids, and Domestic Violence.** A DVD to train police officers in how to reduce the traumatic impact for children of a domestic violence call.
- **Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents.** A comprehensive curriculum, taught by a mental health professional and a foster parent mentor, to teach resource parents how to help the traumatized children in their care.
- **Psychological First Aid.** A print and online evidence-informed approach to enable first responders and volunteer workers to meet the immediate needs and concerns of disaster survivors.
- **Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators.** A guide that provides school administrators, teachers, staff, and parents with basic information about working with traumatized children in the school setting.
- **Ten Things Every Juvenile Court Judge Should Know about Trauma and Delinquency.** A technical assistance bulletin highlighting crucial facts judges should know so they can best meet the needs of traumatized children involved with the court system.



For more information about the NCTSN, a listing of local centers, and suggestions on what you can do to help, visit www.NCTSN.org. You can also send questions via e-mail to info@NCTSN.org.

Educating Families and Communities

The support of family, community, and society is crucial to reducing trauma's impact on children. Families and communities already know this intuitively but need targeted information and proven tools. Through our Web site (NCTSN.org), public education efforts, and online Learning Center (<http://learn.nctsn.org>), the NCTSN has become the foremost source of reliable and comprehensive information on child traumatic stress for families, communities, and the public.

“When the NCTSN started, no one in our area knew about child traumatic stress. Now judges are ordering trauma-focused assessment and treatment from the bench. Participation in the Network has really transformed our community.”

NCTSN MEMBER





www.nctsn.org

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