



Los Angeles County DMH, Continuum of Care Reform Division

Trauma/Resilience Tip of the Week: Impact of Trauma

The term complex trauma describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually begin early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child's development and the formation of a self.



Here are some common effects of complex trauma:

Attachments and Relationships: Difficulties controlling and expressing emotions; may react violently or inappropriately.

Physical Health: Body and Brain: Body dysregulation; hypersensitive to senses, or may suffer from anesthesia and analgesia.

Emotional Responses: Difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions. May experience significant depression, anxiety, or anger.

Dissociation: Impacts the ability to be fully present in daily activities causing adverse effects on learning, classroom behavior, and social interactions.

Behavior: May appear unpredictable, oppositional, volatile, and extreme (ie: illegal activities, such as

alcohol and substance use, assaulting others, stealing, running away, and/or prostitution.)

Cognition: Thinking and Learning: Problems thinking clearly, reasoning, or problem solving. Learning difficulties that may require support in the academic environment.

Self-Concept and Future Orientation: Feelings of shame, guilt, low self-esteem, a poor self-image, and trouble feeling hopeful.

Long-Term Health Consequences: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study results demonstrated the connection between childhood trauma exposure, high-risk behaviors (e.g., smoking, unprotected sex), chronic illness (e.g., heart disease and cancer), and early death.