

What is Childhood Trauma?



Cause for Concern

In this world of uncertainty, as well as the way the pandemic may be increasing instances of family violence and other types of abuse, all school staff would benefit from having an adequate understanding of the impact of trauma and adversity on children.



Teachers and school leaders would also benefit from knowledge about trauma and adversity when responding to children's challenging behaviours. In education, such understanding and techniques are known as "trauma-informed pedagogy".

What is Childhood Trauma?

Trauma is the response to exposure to a stressful or traumatic event, or a series of such events or experiences.

Most children have nurturing home environments, but a concerning number experience trauma through abuse or neglect. It's estimated around 8.9% of children experience physical abuse, 8.6% sexual abuse, 8.7% emotional abuse and 2.4% neglect. The rates could be higher as such experiences are difficult to measure.

Children may also experience trauma or adversity by observing family violence, parent separation, having a parent incarcerated or with a mental illness, or due to grief from the loss of a loved one. Trauma can occur because of conflict or war, or due to a natural disaster, such as the recent bushfires.

COVID-19 has led to higher amounts of traumatic experiences and adversity in households. Around one-third of families are going through increased financial hardship and, for many women, the pandemic has coincided with the beginning of family violence, or an increase in it.

Trauma often has negative effects on children's development and behaviour. It can increase the risk of depression and suicide attempts, psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, and alcohol and drug use.

It's important to note, not all children are negatively impacted by trauma — some even experience posttraumatic growth in which they learn more about themselves and their strengths.



A strong body of evidence shows trauma can affect brains structures linked to learning, and control of emotions and behaviour. These effects can make it difficult for children to learn, make friends and develop positive relationships with teachers.

Trauma and adversity can also disrupt children's impulse control in the classroom and on the playground.

References:

Content taken from **The Conversation**.

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