

## WHY EVERY TEACHER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

# Child Development and Trauma Specialist Practise Resource: 5-7 Years



### Developmental Trends

The Following information needs to be understood in the context of the overview statement on child development:

#### Physical skills

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• active, involved in physical activity, vigorous play</li> <li>• may tire easily</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• variation in levels of coordination and skill</li> <li>• many become increasingly proficient in skills, games, sports</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some may be able to ride a bicycle</li> <li>• may use hands with dexterity and skill to make things, do craft and build things</li> </ul> |
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#### Social-emotional development

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|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has strong relationships within the family and an integral place in family dynamics</li> <li>• needs caregiver assistance and structure to regulate extremes of emotion</li> <li>• generally anxious to please and to gain adult approval, praise and reassurance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conscience is starting to be influenced by internal control or doing the right thing "I would take it, but if my parents found out, they would be disapproving"</li> <li>• not fully capable of estimating own abilities, may become frustrated by failure</li> <li>• reassured by predictable routines</li> <li>• friendships very important, although they may change regularly</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may need help moving into and becoming part of a group</li> <li>• some children will maintain strong friendships over the period</li> <li>• may have mood swings</li> <li>• able to share, although not all the time</li> <li>• perception of, and level of regard for self, fairly well developed</li> </ul> |
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Cognitive and creative characteristics		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>emerging literacy and numeracy abilities, gaining skills in reading and writing</li> <li>variable attention and ability to stay on task; attends better if interested</li> <li>good communication skills, remembers, tells and enjoys jokes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>may require verbal, written or behavioural cues and reminders to follow directions and obey rules</li> <li>skills in listening and understanding may be more advanced than expression</li> <li>perspective broadens as experiences at school and in the community expand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>most valuable learning occurs through play</li> <li>rules more likely to be followed if he/she has contributed to them</li> <li>may have strong creative urges to make things</li> </ul>

Possible Indicators of Trauma		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>behavioural changes</li> <li>increased, tension, irritability, reactivity, and inability to relax</li> <li>sleep disturbances, nightmares, night terrors, difficulty falling or staying asleep</li> <li>regression to behaviour of younger child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lack of eye contact</li> <li>'spacey', distractible, or hyperactive behaviour</li> <li>lack of control over bladder and bowel movements or smearing of faeces</li> <li>eating disturbances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>bodily aches and pains – no apparent reason</li> <li>accident proneness</li> <li>absconding/truanting from school</li> <li>firelighting, hurting animals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>obvious anxiety, fearfulness and loss of self-esteem</li> <li>frightened by own intensity of feelings</li> <li>specific fears</li> <li>efforts to distance from feelings of shame, guilt, humiliation and reduced capacity to feel emotions</li> <li>reduced capacity to feel emotions – may appear 'numb', or apathetic</li> <li>'frozen watchfulness'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>vulnerable to anniversary reactions caused by seasonal events, holidays, etc</li> <li>repeated retelling of traumatic event</li> <li>withdrawal, depressed affect</li> <li>'blanking out' or loss of concentration when under stress at school with lowering of performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explicit, aggressive, exploitive, sexualised relating/engagement with other children</li> <li>sexualised behaviour towards adults</li> <li>verbally describes experiences of sexual abuse pointing to body parts and telling about the 'game' they played</li> <li>sexualised drawing</li> <li>excessive concern or preoccupation with private parts and adult sexual behaviour</li> <li>verbal or behavioural indications of age-inappropriate knowledge of adult sexual behaviour</li> <li>running away from home</li> </ul>

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### Trauma impact

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• changes in behaviour</li> <li>• hyperarousal, hypervigilance, hyperactivity</li> <li>• regression in recently acquired developmental gains</li> <li>• sleep disturbances due to intrusive imagery</li> <li>• lack of control over bladder and bowel movements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trauma driven, acting out risk taking behaviour</li> <li>• eating disturbances</li> <li>• loss of concentration and memory</li> <li>• flight into driven activity or retreat from others to manage inner turmoil</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• post-traumatic re-enactments of traumatic event that may occur secretly and involve siblings or playmates</li> <li>• loss of interest in previously pleasurable activities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fear of trauma recurring</li> <li>• mood or personality change</li> <li>• loss of, or reduced capacity to attune with caregiver</li> <li>• loss of, or reduced capacity to manage emotional states or self soothe</li> <li>• increased self-focusing and withdrawal</li> <li>• concern about personal responsibility for trauma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wish for revenge and action oriented responses to trauma</li> <li>• may experience acute distress encountering any reminder of trauma</li> <li>• lowered self-esteem</li> <li>• increased anxiety or depression</li> <li>• fearful of closeness and love</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child is likely to have detailed, long-term and sensory memory for traumatic event - sometimes the memory is fragmented or repressed</li> <li>• factual, accurate memory may be embellished by elements of fear or wish; perception of duration may be distorted</li> <li>• intrusion of unwanted visual images and traumatic reactions disrupt concentration and create anxiety often without parent awareness</li> <li>• vulnerable to flashbacks of recall and anniversary reactions to reminders of trauma</li> <li>• speech and cognitive delays</li> </ul>

#### Reference:

*Australian Victorian State Government Health and Human Services  
 Adapted for a global audience by Get into Neurodiversity.*