



Mentors Can Help Kids Heal from Trauma

Promote healing and avoid re-traumatization by understanding how violence impacts a child's health and development.



Almost half of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one or more types of serious childhood trauma.

Traumatic stress occurs when children are exposed to traumatic events – like domestic violence, abuse, sexual violence, and community violence – and when that exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what has been experienced.

Trauma can impact the physical development of a child's brain and can have profound effects on a child's long-term health. Children who have been exposed to traumatic events may:



HAVE DIFFICULTY EXPRESSING AND REGULATING EMOTIONS.



HAVE INTENSE REACTIONS TO SITUATIONS AND HAVE TROUBLE CALMING THEMSELVES DOWN.



HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH PROBLEM SOLVING OR REASONING.



HAVE TROUBLE PAYING ATTENTION OR FOCUSING.



HAVE DIFFICULTY FORMING NEW RELATIONSHIPS OR TRUSTING OTHER PEOPLE.



EXPERIENCE LONG-TERM NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH.

WHAT CAN MENTORS DO?

The most important factor for children who develop resilience is a stable and consistent relationship with a caring and supportive adult. As a mentor in a child's life, you are uniquely poised to support young people, and to help them develop resiliency – their ability to thrive in the face of future challenges. Here's how you can help.

1

AVOID TRAUMA TRIGGERS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Some sounds or experiences can cause young people to suddenly re-experience the stress and hurt of traumatic events they've experienced. You can help by becoming aware of these "triggers" and attempting to minimize them wherever possible.



LOUD OR UNEXPECTED NOISES

Slamming doors, announcements made over loudspeakers, and shouting can all trigger a traumatic response. When possible, provide advance notice to avoid your mentee from being startled.



HARSH LIGHTING

Similarly, lights that are very bright or harsh, like fluorescents, can be triggering for some children. Try using lamps or covered overhead fluorescents as alternatives.



UNWELCOME OR UNEXPECTED TOUCH

Always ask permission or give warning before physically touching a child.



OVERSTIMULATION

Environments with lots of people, movement, and changes in lighting can be overwhelming to some youth. Let youth know what to expect in advance of the outing and offer alternatives if the situation becomes uncomfortable.

2

PROMOTE HEALING BY USING EVERYDAY GESTURES

These gestures seem simple, but research shows that building caring and consistent relationships with young people is the most important thing adults can do to support healing. When done every day, these small gestures can make a huge difference in the life of a child.



COMFORT

Be patient and calm when children are under stress. Practice relaxation techniques when children are not under stress.

"When I'm upset and can't think clearly, deep breathing sometimes helps. Should we try it together?"



LISTEN

Be open to their ideas and opinions. Ask open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer.

"Tell me how things are going at school."



INSPIRE

Ask them who their role models are and why, and help them focus on what qualities they admire.

"Who would you be if you could be anyone in the world?"



COLLABORATE

Engage them with a step-by-step problem-solving process until you reach a solution.

"Let's work together to come up with a plan to help you..."



CELEBRATE

Encourage trial and error problem-solving skills to teach them how to persevere. Celebrate the process.

"You have clearly worked so hard on this. I love to see the effort you've put in."

3

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Working with trauma-impacted youth can also have an effect on the mental and emotional health of supportive adults. Remember that your own wellness is an essential resource for success. You can model resiliency and ensure that you are well prepared to fully show up for children in your life by:

Strengthening supporting relationships

Apologizing for missteps, even when no harm was intended

Staying calm in unpleasant situations

Asking for help when you need it

Accepting mistakes as opportunities to learn

Discover more about the Changing Minds everyday gestures, science of childhood trauma, and the power of a caring, consistent adult at: ChangingMindsNow.org