

Trauma Signs & Symptoms Across Developmental Ages and Stages

In reviewing this handout, please note that with any list of signs and symptoms, we need to be careful to understand children's responses in the context of their current and past experiences. We might observe many of these signs and symptoms in children who have not had trauma exposure.

Ages and Stages	Developmental Tasks	Signs and Symptoms
Infants and Toddlers (Birth to 2 ½ years)	Social <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure and responsive attachment relationship Trust and basic needs Emotional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependence on others to manage feelings Learns self-soothing and calming Cognitive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New experiences in everyday activities Exploring the world, relationships between objects, cause and effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating disturbances Sleep disturbances Somatic complaints Clingy/difficulty separating/separation anxiety Feeling helpless and passive Constricted play, exploration, and mood Irritable, difficult to soothe Loss of recent developmental achievements General fearfulness Development of new fears Easily startled Hyper-vigilance Aggressive behavior Talking about the traumatic event and reacting to reminders
Young Children (2 ½ to 6 years)	Social <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliance on caregivers for support Interact and relate to others, sharing Emotional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of autonomy and self-confidence Control of emotions Cognitive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquiring knowledge about the world Think and play symbolically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoidant, anxious, clingy, or aggressive, defiant Poor peer relationships, social problems (controlling or passive) Fearfulness, sadness, depression Helplessness, passivity, low frustration Restless, hyperactive, impulsive, moody Physical symptoms: headaches, stomachaches, dizziness, etc. Accident prone Inattention, difficulty problem solving, learning disabilities, school problems Daydreaming or dissociation Loss of recent developmental achievements Posttraumatic play Talking about the traumatic event and reacting to reminders

Ages and Stages	Developmental Tasks	Signs and Symptoms
School Age Children (6-11 years)	<p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents main source of support and protection • Expanding reliance on outside adults and peers <p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More sophisticated weighing of feelings and those of others • Increased mastery <p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explosion of cognitive growth • Abstract thinking, taking others point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressive, withdrawn, and defiant behavior • Fears and anxiety • Hyper-vigilance • Posttraumatic play • Intrusive thoughts and talking about the trauma • Sleep disturbance • Physical symptoms: headaches, stomachaches, dizziness, etc • Fantasies of revenge • Self-blame, sees self as “bad” and responsible • Inattention, difficulty problem solving, learning difficulties, school problems • Daydreaming or dissociation • Poor peer relationships, difficulty maintaining relationships • Acts like parent to siblings • School failure/absenteeism • Guilt feelings • Avoidance of trauma reminders • Sees the world as unfair
Adolescents (12-18 years)	<p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships are key • Struggle to gain autonomy and individual identity • Intimate relationships with peers <p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push for independence • Sense of identify and self-reliance • Responding to hormonal changes and sexual urges <p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to reason abstractly • Use expanding cognitive skills to understand relationships and reflect on own identity • Capacity to carry out complex demands of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shame and guilt related to the trauma • Difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships, shifts with friends and peer group • Social withdrawal, feeling betrayed • Engaging in posttraumatic reenactments that are self-endangering • Runaway or premature flight to adulthood • Difficulty separating from parent/home • Assuming parentified role in the family • Sees no future for self, no sense of purpose, world as unpredictable/unfair • Anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts/behavior related to the trauma • Managing feelings through self-harming behaviors (e.g. cutting, substance use) • Somatic complaints and physical symptoms • Sleep disturbances and eating disorders • Engaging in risky sexual behavior • Impaired problem solving skills • School problems/school failure/difficulty concentrating • Daydreaming and dissociation (loses time, spaces out) • Revenge fantasies or plans