

# Child Development and Trauma Impacts for Parents

Children are different and each develops at their own rate. For some children and adolescents the trauma and stress of being homeless or experiencing family violence can affect their development. The following information will highlight some of the milestones which children and adolescents generally experience at certain stages and how trauma may impact on their development. There are also some tips and activities that can help you to support your child.

|  | Babies   | Toddlers   | Pre-Schoolers   | Primary Schoolers   | Adolescents   |
|--|--|--|---|---|---|
| Development  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn to manage their feelings when there is an adult who cuddles them, plays with them and talks to them</li> <li>Often fear loud or unexpected noises, strange objects, new situations or people</li> <li>Need to feel sure that someone will always take care of them. This is how babies learn to feel safe and to trust others</li> <li>Learn through all their senses, by what is around them and by copying people closest to them</li> <li>Learn to talk when parents/ carers sing songs, talk about everyday things and read books aloud, even if only for short times</li> <li>Love the sound of loving voices and to look at people's smiling faces</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are curious about their world and other people they want to explore and learn.</li> <li>May not want to be away from parent</li> <li>Like to play near other children, but not with other children</li> <li>Are not ready to share toys</li> <li>Are becoming more independent but are not aware of danger/risk</li> <li>Like routine and can have difficulty changing from one activity to another</li> <li>Are easily frustrated and will have temper tantrums</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin to play with other children and for longer periods of time and are curious about everything and will ask lots of questions</li> <li>They use imaginative play</li> <li>They will copy adult behaviours</li> <li>Communicate their wants more clearly using simple sentences</li> <li>Are becoming more independent eg want to dress themselves</li> <li>Enjoy helping with simple tasks eg washing up</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friendships are important</li> <li>Primary School is an important part of a child's life. It is a time for learning to read, write and make friends</li> <li>Enjoy playing games with teams</li> <li>Can manage an increasing range of tasks independently</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Puberty brings about huge psychological and emotional changes</li> <li>Increased importance of friendships</li> <li>Increased sexual awareness</li> <li>May struggle with who they are and what they want</li> <li>May begin to push the boundaries</li> <li>Increased risk taking</li> <li>Swings between child like behaviour and wanting to be treated as adult</li> </ul>  |
| Possible impacts on health, emotional and social wellbeing and learning across all developmental ages and stages |  |  |   |   |   |
| Potential Impacts of Trauma  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May change their feeding/ sleeping patterns</li> <li>May cry a lot more than is usual for them and be harder to settle or may become very quiet and not seem to care about, or cry about anything</li> <li>May be much more sensitive to loud noises and new people and may need more cuddles and reassurance</li> <li>When a parent is more stressed, upset, distracted or angry, the baby can tell and can feel very unsafe, and scared</li> <li>When babies are fearful, feel unsafe and have poor sleep they can be slower to learn and to reach their milestones</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not understand that adults may be too tired or stressed to play with them</li> <li>Find it difficult to learn new skills when feeling unsafe</li> <li>May find it hard to settle and play</li> <li>May be a change in eating, sleeping and settling routines</li> <li>Fearful of strangers</li> <li>Sometimes your toddler will only want you</li> <li>Increased irritability and tantrums</li> <li>May become very quiet and not interested in anything</li> <li>Little eye contact with others</li> <li>May become overly upset by little things</li> <li>Go back to baby behaviours</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sometimes your child will only want to be with you</li> <li>Reluctant to attend familiar places such as Kinder</li> <li>May go back to toddler behaviours eg thumb sucking and bed wetting</li> <li>Eating and sleeping habits might change</li> <li>May have nightmares or be reluctant to go to bed</li> <li>Changes in behaviour</li> <li>May become aggressive or seem very quiet</li> <li>More easily upset by events/ changes</li> <li>Increase in tantrums</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sometimes health problems become more noticeable i.e hearing and speech delay</li> <li>May become aggressive or seem very quiet</li> <li>Reluctant to go to bed, difficulty sleeping may have nightmares</li> <li>Lack of concentration and school work may suffer</li> <li>Withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities and friends</li> <li>Feels responsible for family situation and takes on adult roles</li> <li>Headaches and stomach aches</li> <li>May be bullied or display bullying behaviours to siblings or friends</li> <li>Can become frustrated and have difficulty expressing how they feel</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong feelings including anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety and difficulty managing them</li> <li>Acting out /risk taking/self harming</li> <li>Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities</li> <li>Depression/anxiety/mood swing</li> <li>May spend more time with friends</li> <li>Self medicating with drugs, alcohol and sex</li> <li>Disturbed sleep</li> <li>Self absorbed</li> <li>School refusal</li> <li>Impulsive behaviours and decision making</li> <li>Feels responsible for family situation and takes on adult roles</li> </ul>      |
| Tips   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most reassuring thing for a baby is a parent who is loving, offers lots of cuddles, eye contact and a loving voice</li> <li>It is not possible to spoil your baby by responding to their crying or distress. It is the best thing you can do to help your baby feel safe</li> <li>Babies need stimulation through simple games, happy faces, being talked to in a happy/playful/gentle voice</li> <li>All parents have times when it is really hard to respond in a loving way to a crying baby or to play with their baby. Please speak to your worker about some support as there is help available</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toddlers often want the parent very close and enjoy books, singing, pretend games. These can provide quiet, cuddle- time that can be very calming for parent and child</li> <li>Outside play can be stimulating, allow lots of running etc. It can improve a toddler's sleeping and mood</li> <li>Distraction can help a toddler before their frustration becomes overwhelming</li> <li>Consistent routine, rules and predicability make a child feel safer. It is very common for parents to find themselves wanting to loosen the rules for children during/after a difficult time but this can be more unsettling for young children and make it harder to resume these boundaries later on</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May need you to spend more time with them</li> <li>Keep routines the same as far as possible</li> <li>Prepare children for changes in the day moving from one place to another with lots of reassurance</li> <li>Talk to your child about what is happening in their day</li> <li>Encourage children to draw, play and have fun even when you are stressed</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen to your child</li> <li>Explain what is happening in words they can understand</li> <li>Accept that children might see the situation differently to you and keep talking to them</li> <li>Keep in contact with the school to see how they are doing</li> <li>Re establish normal activities to the best of your ability in the circumstances</li> <li>Seek support for you and your child if needed</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let them know you are always available to talk</li> <li>Provide reassurance</li> <li>Discuss feelings of distress and anger and let teens know that this is normal</li> <li>Respect their emotions and reactions</li> <li>Accept that they might see the situation differently to you</li> <li>Be honest and patient with them</li> <li>Maintain communication with their teachers and school</li> <li>Encourage healthy ways to deal with stress eg exercise and healthy eating</li> <li>Seek professional help if they are struggling to cope</li> </ul> |