



## A Closer Look at Trauma

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter one's sense of security. For our mentees, witnessing a parent's arrest, being physically removed from home to live with a relative or an unfamiliar foster parent, not knowing where the parent is, or when they might return are emotionally traumatic experiences that can leave a child more vulnerable to stress. At the March Seedling Mentor Training, presenter Kris Downing, LCSW, Clinical & Professional Development Coordinator for Communities In Schools of Central Texas shared her knowledge and research on ***Trauma and its Effects*** in the school setting.

The impact emotional trauma has on a child's brain can manifest in behaviors that when triggered seem illogical and difficult to understand. An emotionally traumatic experience causes the brain to enter into a state of fear-related activation or survival mode: fight, flight or freeze (dissociate). This survival response is hard to unlearn. As a result, when a child who has experienced an emotionally traumatic event in the past feels anxiety in their day to day life, their fear state is triggered. Their "normal" reaction may be impulsivity, withdrawal, forgetfulness, sadness, dissociation, agitation, opposition, or "deer in the headlights" stare.

These behaviors and responses can be confusing and seem out of place. The good news is that a child's brain is very "elastic" and can change in response to positive experiences. Interventions that restore a sense of safety and control are very important for a traumatized child, promoting resilience or the ability to bounce back from difficult experiences. Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or other significant sources of stress.

Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and trust provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance to help bolster a person's resilience. **The core value to kids who have experienced trauma is to feel safe.** Mentoring is a key example. By being a constant, reliable, and accepting presence, you are an anchor for your mentee. By using affirmative self-statements, encouraging their efforts, and acknowledging your mentee's feelings, you are creating happy experiences that can contribute to a healthy brain chemistry and enhance their emotional well-being.

To watch a 60 minute video about how trauma impacts student learning and behavior and how educators and support staff can help students develop a greater sense of safety click <http://ciscentraltexas.org/resources/traumatraining/>. To view this video, copy and paste this address into your Firefox web browser.

To learn more about ***Child Trauma***, visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network website [NCTSN Child Trauma](http://nctsn.org/child-trauma)

For a detailed explanation of ***How Trauma Affects the Brain*** click [here](#)