

Factsheet 4: The impact of trauma for children and young people

Children and young people can feel the impact of dangerous and frightening events, both when they experience them directly and when they hear about these events from their parents or loved ones.

Because they are young, understanding these events and expressing their thoughts and feelings may be difficult.

Children and young people's responses to frightening events can be misunderstood as being 'naughty' or 'difficult'. It can be difficult for parents and carers to understand this behaviour, especially if they are dealing with their own distress.

Just like adults, the effects of trauma for children and young people can show up right away or take months or even years to appear. In addition to the impact of trauma, children and young people may be dealing with new challenges in Australia, like making friends, learning a new language, and starting a new school. They may also be experiencing bullying, discrimination or racism.



Common reactions to trauma and stress for children and young people:



01 Re-experiencing frightening memories of what happened:

- Distressing memories during the day affecting learning
- Nightmares or fear about bedtime, wanting to sleep in parents' bed
- Emotional and physical distress around reminders of the events (like bed-wetting, trembling, freezing or appearing distracted)
- Talking about the event with little emotion
- Replaying the events during play or drawing

02 Wanting to stay away from reminders of the past:

- Refusal to join school activities
- Difficulty remembering important details about the past
- Avoiding talking about or being around people or situations related to the past
- Not wanting to socialise or play with other children

03 Feeling tense, unable to relax and ready for danger:

- Concern about something bad happening to family or friends
- Clinginess or distress at separation from caregivers or teachers
- Increased irritability, anger or tantrums
- Difficulty concentrating at school and learning
- Overly alert and restless, unable to sit still or relax
- Easily startled by loud noises
- Trouble sleeping alone
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, and changes in appetite (not hungry or always hungry, fussy eating)



04 Changes in the way you think and feel about yourself, others, and the world:

- Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
- Lack of emotional reactions, seeming numb (no feelings)
- Sad and withdrawn appearance, tearfulness
- Loss of confidence and limited exploratory behaviour, increased clinginess
- Distrust of others, rejecting help or being very independent
- Aggressive behaviour toward self or others (hitting, biting, self-harm)
- Blaming themselves for events or things they did/didn't do



*It is important to note that children may be impacted by what their parents went through, even if they were not there or they were born later. This is called **intergenerational trauma**. Stress and trauma can affect the way parents connect, express feelings, cope with emotions, and talk to their children. Taking care of the wellbeing of parents and carers is essential in supporting the wellbeing of children.*

To speak with QPASTT or find out more about our services, please call 07 3391 6677 or visit qpastt.org.au.

QPASTT is the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma. It is a community organisation which provides a variety of flexible and culturally sensitive support services to people who have been tortured or who have suffered refugee-related trauma. QPASTT has offices across Queensland.