

The 12 Core Concepts for Understanding Traumatic Stress Responses in Children and Families Adapted for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

The *12 Core Concepts for Understanding Traumatic Stress Responses in Children and Families* provide a rationale for trauma-informed assessment and intervention. The Concepts cover a broad range of points that practitioners and agencies should consider as they strive to assess, understand, and assist trauma-exposed children, families, and communities in trauma-informed ways.

1. Traumatic experiences are inherently complex.



Traumatic events consist of many moments filled with different sensations, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Moment-to-moment reactions can be even more complex due to physical, cognitive or communicative limitations that impact both understanding of events and the range of protective actions that were possible during the traumatic experience.

2. Trauma occurs within a broad context that includes youth's personal characteristics, life experiences, and current circumstances.



It is important to understand the traumatic experience within the context of how IDD affects the child's everyday life.

3. Traumatic events often lead to hardships, negative life changes, and distressing reminders in youth's daily lives.



Trauma may add to hardships related to IDD experienced by the child and family that existed prior to the traumatic experience, and IDD issues may compound disaster-related effects (e.g. loss of needed resources) In addition, effects of trauma reminders may be misinterpreted as reflecting the child's IDD symptoms.

4. Youth can show a wide range of reactions to trauma and loss.



Recognizing reactions to trauma in children with IDD can be complicated by the wide-ranging expressions of their disabilities.

5. Danger and safety are primary concerns in the lives of youth who have had traumatic experiences.



Restoring trust requires both time and strategies which take the child's IDD into account.

6. Traumatic experiences affect the family and broader caregiving system.



Child, family & caregiving systems may feel devastated by what happened to their child and overwhelmed by their specific needs, which are over and above the needs they already had (related to the child's IDD).

7. A child's individual, family and community strengths can protect against the harmful effects of trauma and loss.



Reassure parents/caregivers that strategies for addressing the effects of traumatic experiences can be adapted for children with IDD by enhancing protective factors.

8. Trauma and the hardships that follow can strongly influence development.



Traumatic experiences may result in a significant setback in developmental progress, which was already challenged by IDD.

9. Children's developing brains influence how they react to and are affected by traumatic experiences.



IDD may affect how the child appraises and responds to danger.

10. Culture is closely interwoven with traumatic experiences, responses, and recovery.



Children with IDD and their families are often part of many cultural identities and communities, including disability communities, which may impact the experience and expression and of trauma.

11. Challenges to the social contract, including legal and ethical issues, affect trauma response and recovery.



Children with IDD and their families are impacted by societal attitudes about disability, which can affect their capacity to martial support and/or justice in the face of traumatic experiences.

12. Working with trauma-exposed youth can cause distress in families and other caregivers that make it more difficult for them to provide good care.



For caregivers of youth with IDD, traumatic experiences may (re-)evoke concerns about the vulnerability of their child and their own inability to protect the child from harm.