

# The Effect of Trauma on a Child's Brain

## What It Looks Like and What You Can Do to Help



**1 in 4 children in foster care** will exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

### What is trauma?

Trauma is an emotional response to a harmful event whether it is physical, emotional, real or perceived. It can threaten the child or someone close to her in a single event or over time.

### Trauma can influence children's:

- > BRAINS
- > BEHAVIORS
- > BODIES
- > EMOTIONS

### What does trauma look like?

#### AGE 0-5

- Irritability
- Frequent tantrums
- Clinginess
- Reluctance to explore
- Delays in reaching milestones

#### AGE 6-12

- Difficulty paying attention
- Being withdrawn
- Changes in school performance
- Difficulty transitioning from one activity to the next
- Frequent headaches and/or stomachaches

#### AGE 13-16

- Revisiting trauma frequently or avoiding it
- Refusal to follow rules
- Rejecting authority
- Risky behaviors
- Fatigue
- Substance use
- Depression

### How can you support your child?

- Be emotionally and physically available
- Do not take behavior personally
- Identify triggers
- Listen
- Avoid physical punishment
- Respond, don't react
- Allow some control
- Be patient

If you are a foster parent, and you are struggling with a child who has trauma or behavioral problems, Foster Village can help.

**LEARN MORE**  
[www.fostervillage.com](http://www.fostervillage.com)

AdoptUSKids. (2020). Understanding trauma.

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2014). Parenting a child who has experienced trauma.

Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.