



CARE Skill No.1 TRAUMA AND STRESS

*We need to shift our thinking from “What is wrong with you?” to
“What happened to you?”
Sandra Bloom*

Goal: Be curious to understand the meaning behind maladaptive or challenging (pain based) behaviour.

Most Children in Out Of Home Care Have Experienced Some Level of Trauma

- **Trauma** is an event that overwhelms a person’s ability to cope. Trauma can result from a specific traumatic incident of abuse or ongoing neglect, chronic bullying, exposure to domestic violence, disrupted caregiving relationships, etc.
- **Complex Trauma:** the impact of multiple or prolonged traumatic events at critical developmental stages.

Behaviour Makes Sense

- Children and young people do whatever it takes to get their needs met, to survive. When experiencing complex trauma, they may cry, be clingy or standoffish, manipulate, hit, disassociate, and be hyper-aware of their environment/attuned to danger.

Trauma Is Toxic to the Brain

- Early complex trauma changes the brain. Survival strategies the person used are strengthened in the brain and become **automatic responses**.
- Typical pathways in the brain do not get developed as they should so children who experience trauma may hold many of the following beliefs: *I’m not safe, people want to hurt me, people can’t be trusted, the world is dangerous, I’m not good enough for people to care about me, it will never get better.*
- The good news is that therapeutic care can create new pathways in the brain to access some of the developmental skills that are missing such as trusting others, managing emotions, social skills, problem solving, flexibility, etc.

Challenging Behaviour is often Pain-Based Behaviour

- The pain children and young people experience as a result of trauma is often expressed as self-injury, running away, aggression, hostility, isolation, refusal, manipulation, verbal outbursts, etc. The pain may be due to current stressors or due to past trauma.
- Once a person is triggered, it often takes a long time to return to baseline (pre-crisis state).

CARE PRINCIPLES



Congruence

- Everyone experiences stress at times in our jobs and in our lives.
- Be curious and supportive with one another as well as with the people we support.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

ASK WHEN INTERACTING with Children, Young People, Family Members, and Others.....

- How does this behaviour make sense?
- Could this behaviour be pain-based?
- What current or historic event might have triggered the pain?
- Am I adding pain to pain?
- Is there anything I can do to relieve the pain?

WHEN PROVIDING clinical support.....

- Explain these same ideas to children, young people, carers and families
- Explore possible connections between current behaviour and past history
- Reflect and be curious about possible triggers
- Consider ways to replace maladaptive coping strategies with adaptive ones
- Have young people, carers and front line staff pay attention over the week and come back with one example of something that might have been pain-based. See if they can connect the behaviour to a trigger.

WHEN WORKING WITH each other...

- Remember, *people do well if they can.*
- Be sensitive that reactivity, irritability, sadness, unpredictable behaviour might be a response to stress. Consider ways to help relieve that stress.
- Find ways to have fun together.
- Respect one another's boundaries and honour people's time-off.
- Notice and acknowledge when staff and carers put information from this handout into action in the work they do.
- If you are interacting with a person who works directly with children, young people and families, use this handout as a reminder of the tremendous internal strength it takes to regularly respond in a supportive, caring, and therapeutic manner when faced with pain-based behaviour on a daily basis. It is possible that stress from these interactions may come out in interactions with each other.