



Trauma and Foster Care

- Trauma is a psychologically distressing event that induces an abnormally intense and prolonged stress response.
- One in four American children have been traumatized
- Causes of trauma for children in foster care include:
 - Abuse and neglect in the home
 - The removal from all that they know (family, home, friends, schools)
 - Separation from parents and siblings
 - Placement with strangers (new rules, new foods, new smells)
 - Lack of access to information about their parents and siblings
 - Uncertainty about future permanency
- Trauma can manifest in any number of ways, including:
 - **Ages 5 and younger:** may fear being separated from parent, crying, whimpering, screaming, immobility and/or aimless motion, trembling, frightened facial expressions, and excessive clinging. May regress—return to behaviors exhibited at earlier ages (e.g., bed-wetting, fear of darkness). Children of this age are strongly affected by the parents’ reactions to the traumatic event.
 - **Ages 6 to 11:** may show extreme withdrawal, disruptive behavior, and/or inability to pay attention. Regressive behaviors, nightmares, sleep problems, irrational fears, irritability, refusal to attend school, angry outbursts, and fighting are common. Child may complain of stomachaches or other bodily symptoms that have no medical basis. Schoolwork often suffers. Depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt, and emotional numbing or “flatness” are often present as well.
 - **Ages 12 to 17:** may exhibit responses similar to those of adults, including flashbacks, nightmares, emotional numbing, avoidance of reminders of traumatic event, depression, substance abuse, problems with peers, and

antisocial behavior. Also common are withdrawal and isolation, physical complaints, suicidal thoughts, cutting, school avoidance, academic decline, sleep disturbances, and confusion. May feel extreme guilt over his or her failure to prevent injury or loss of life, and may harbor revenge fantasies that interfere with recovery.

How CASA Can Help

- All advocates and staff are trauma-informed. We all have a basic understanding of how trauma impacts child brain development.
 - Realize it is real
 - Recognize it when you see it
 - Avoid re-traumatization
- CASA volunteers are trained on how to interact with traumatized children.
 - CASA volunteers are consistent and reliable. Traumatized kids need lots of structure to rebuild a sense of safety and trust, so advocates visit every month and follow through with agreed upon tasks.
 - CASA volunteers don't discuss the trauma with the child, but they do recommend therapeutic interventions as needed.
 - CASA volunteers are careful about physical affection, recognizing that it can be a trigger for abused children.
 - CASA volunteers ask the children for their input, giving them a sense of control and a voice in their lives.
 - CASA volunteers learn about the individual child from many perspectives
 - School
 - Resource parents
 - Biological parents
 - Other stakeholders
 - They identify and facilitate needed resources/interventions
 - They advocate for the child's best interests through recommendations to the court
 - They monitor to ensure that needed services are being provided