

TF-CBT

Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



WHAT ARE SOME REACTIONS TO TRAUMA?

Children and adolescents who have been traumatized can develop an intense fear regarding any reminders of the traumatic event. This fear may encourage the child to avoid any traumatic reminders and may not want to talk about what occurred. The child may become more isolated, not express his or her feelings or thoughts, and feel emotional numbing and tension. This stressful state can cause the child to develop symptoms such as:

- Inability or unwillingness to recall trauma details
- Difficulty stopping thoughts about the trauma
- Emotional and physical numbing
- Recalling physical sensations that occurred during trauma
- Difficulty staying still or fidgeting
- Sleeping routine is disturbed (not wanting to sleep alone, nightmares, waking up in the middle of the night)
- Rapid changes in mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self esteem
- Inability to trust others
- Drug use
- Desire to hurt oneself or others

Exhibiting one or several of these symptoms or behaviors places the child at risk of having problems at school, of isolating themselves from others, of having conflicts or lack of communication with parents and peers. These symptoms or behaviors, if left untreated, may impede in the child's normal developmental process.



WHAT IS TF-CBT?

TF-CBT is a therapeutic intervention designed to help children, adolescents, and their parents overcome the impact of traumatic events. For example, it is designed to help with traumas related to sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence, and community violence, an unexpected death of a loved one, natural disasters and war.

The focus of treatment is to:

- Assist the child or adolescent to develop coping strategies for traumatic stress reactions.
- Reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, or acting out behavior which are common in children exposed to trauma.

TF-CBT is provided to children from 3 to 18 years of age by a professional who has received training in TF-CBT. The treatment typically lasts between 12 to 16 sessions. These sessions include:

- Individual sessions for child or adolescent.
- Individual sessions for parents.
- Conjoint sessions between parent and child or adolescent.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that TF-CBT is more effective in helping children overcome trauma than other therapeutic interventions.

WHAT CAN MY CHILD/ADOLESCENT EXPECT FROM TF-CBT?

1. Learning that the trauma was not their fault and that they are not the only ones who have survived a similar traumatic event.
2. Identifying feelings and learning how to manage them.
3. Learning how to relax and tolerate trauma reminders.
4. Identifying negative thoughts that cause depression and anxiety.
5. Learning how to replace negative thoughts with more helpful thoughts.
6. Learning how to resolve problems
7. Learning safety skills.

An important goal in treatment is to provide the child an opportunity to discuss details about the trauma in a supportive and nurturing environment. In developing their trauma narrative the child's brain begins to replace traumatic memories with more helpful thoughts about the trauma. In time, these powerful traumatic reminders begin to lose their impact on the child and become less frequent.



WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO AS A PARENT/GUARDIAN?

The participation of the parent is tremendously important in treatment. Studies show that children whose parents participated in their treatment improve more rapidly. TF-CBT focuses on helping parents by assisting in the following:

- Discussing their own feelings and thoughts about their child's traumatic experience
- Learning techniques to improve parenting skills.
- Improving communication through family sessions.
- Preparing the parent to support their child or adolescent when sharing trauma narrative in conjoint session.
- In cases where parents have also been a trauma survivor there is an opportunity for the parent to process how their trauma impacts their child.

Adapted from the pamphlet, SAMHSA Model Program.

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