

Child development and trauma guide

12 - 18 years

Developmental trends

The following information needs to be understood in the context of the overview statement on child development:

Physical development

- significant physical growth and body changes
- develops greater expertise/skills in sport
- changing health needs for diet, rest, exercise, hygiene and dental care
- puberty, menstruation, sexuality and contraception
- nutritious balanced diet including adequate calcium, protein and iron

Self concept

- can be pre-occupied with self
- secondary sex characteristics affect self concept, relationships with others and activities undertaken
- dealing with own sexuality and that of peers
- developing identity based on gender and culture
- becoming an adult, including opportunities and challenges

Social-emotional development

- empathy for others
- ability to make decisions (moral)
- values and a moral system become firmer and affect views and opinions
- spends time with peers for social and emotional needs beyond parents and family
- peer assessment influences self concept, behaviour/need to conform
- girls have 'best friends', boys have 'mates'
- may explore sexuality by engaging in sexual behaviours and intimate relationships
- develops wider interests
- seeks greater autonomy personally, in decision making
- more responsible in tasks at home, school and work
- experiences emotional turmoil, strong feelings and unpredictable mood swings
- interdependent with parents and family
- conflict with family more likely through puberty
- able to negotiate and assert boundaries
- learning to give and take (reciprocity)
- focus is on the present - may take significant risks
- understands appropriate behaviour but may lack self control/insight

Cognitive and creative characteristics

- thinks logically, abstractly and solves problems thinking like an adult
- may take an interest in/develop opinions about community or world events
- can appreciate others' perspectives and see a problem or situation from different angles
- career choice may be realistic, or at odds with school performance and talents



12 - 18 years • 12 - 18 years • 12 - 18 years • 12 - 18 years • 12 - 18 years • 12 - 18 years • 12 - 18 years • 12 - 18 years

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Possible indicators of trauma

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased tension, irritability, reactivity and inability to relax • accident proneness • reduced eye contact • sleep disturbances, nightmares | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enuresis, encopresis • eating disturbances/disorders • absconding or truanting and challenging behaviours • substance abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aggressive/violent behaviour • firelighting, hurting animals • suicidal ideation • self harming eg. cutting, burning |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • efforts to distance from feelings of shame and humiliation • loss of self-esteem and self confidence • acute psychological distress • personality changes and changes in quality of important relationships evident | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased self-focusing and withdrawal • reduced capacity to feel emotions – may appear ‘numb’ • wish for revenge and action oriented responses to trauma • partial loss of memory and ability to concentrate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trauma flashbacks • acute awareness of parental reactions; wish to protect parents from own distress • sexually exploitive or aggressive interactions with younger children • sexually promiscuous behaviour or total avoidance of sexual involvement • running away from home |

Trauma impact

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sleep disturbances, nightmares • hyperarousal, hypervigilance, hyperactivity • eating disturbances or disorders • trauma acting out, risk taking, sexualised, reckless, regressive or violent behaviour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flight into driven activity and involvement with others or retreat from others in order to manage inner turmoil • vulnerability to withdrawal and pessimistic world view | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vulnerability to depression, anxiety, stress disorders, and suicidal ideation • vulnerability to conduct, attachment, eating and behavioural disorders |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mood and personality changes and changes in quality of important relationships evident • loss of, or reduced capacity to attune with caregiver • loss of, or reduced capacity to manage emotional states or self soothe • lowered self-esteem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flight into adulthood seen as way of escaping impact and memory of trauma (early marriage, pregnancy, dropping out of school, abandoning peer group for older set of friends) • fear of growing up and need to stay within family orbit | <p>Memory for trauma includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acute awareness of and distress with intrusive imagery and memories of trauma • vulnerability to flash backs, episodes of recall, anniversary reactions and seasonal reminders of trauma • may experience acute distress encountering any reminder of trauma • partial loss of memory and concentration |

Parental/carer support following trauma

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| <p>Encourage parent(s)/carers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek, accept and increase support for themselves to manage their own shock and emotions • remain calm. Encourage younger and older adolescents to talk about traumatic event with family members • provide opportunities for young person to spend time with friends who are supportive and meaningful • reassure young person that strong feelings – whether of guilt, shame, embarrassment, or wish for revenge – are normal following a trauma • help young person find activities that offer opportunities to experience mastery, control, and self-esteem • encourage pleasurable physical activities such as sports and dancing • monitor young person’s coping at home, school, and in peer group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address acting-out behaviour involving aggression or self destructive behaviour quickly and firmly with limit setting and professional help • take signs of depression, self harm, accident proneness, recklessness, and persistent personality change seriously by seeking help • help young person develop a sense of perspective on the impact of the traumatic event and a sense of the importance of time in recovering • encourage delaying big decisions • seek information/advice about young person’s developmental and educational progress • provide the young person with frequent high protein snacks/meals during the day • take time to recharge |
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