

Aftereffects of Complex Trauma: A guide to section 3 of the Trauma-Sensitive Review Form

A child who has experienced multiple occurrences of relational trauma such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, or witnessing domestic violence might show one or more of the following seven types of possible aftereffects.

1. Attachment Issues

- a. Difficulty growing close to others
- b. Intense preoccupation with the safety of the caregiver or other loved ones (including precocious caregiving); problems with separations from or difficulty tolerating reunion with them after separation
- c. Social isolation; extreme and persistent distrust, defiance, or lack of reciprocal behavior in close relationships with adults or peers; difficulty gaining support from others
- d. Problems with personal boundaries; inappropriate (excessive or promiscuous) attempts to get intimate contact (including but not limited to sexual or physical intimacy) or excessive reliance on peers or adults for safety and reassurance
- e. Extremely clingy or needy
- f. Lack appropriate stranger fear and not able to discriminate between a stranger who is dangerous and someone who is helpful

2. Physical Health Issues

- a. Developmental delays or regressive behaviors such as bedwetting
- b. Oversensitivity to touch and sound
- c. Undersensitivity to pain (termed “analgesia”)
- d. Problems with coordination, balance, body tone
- e. Chronic physical complaints (for example, headache, stomachache)
- f. Complaints of chronic pain when no physical causes can be found (termed “psychosomatic”)
- g. Sleep or appetite problems

3. Emotional Issues

- a. Difficulty identifying and describing feelings and internal states
- b. Difficulty communicating wishes and desires
- c. Difficulty recovering from or calming down after strong emotional experiences
- d. Easily overwhelmed by stressful situations or becomes emotionally out of control
- e. Persistently depressed or anxious; fearful or on alert all the time

- f. Emotionally numb or cut off; describes not having any strong emotions
- g. Mood shifts that are stronger than might be expected

4. Detachment Issues

- a. Feeling like he/she is observing him/herself from another place in the room, is in a dream, or is not in his or her body
- b. "Spacing out" or "checking out" when confronted with reminders of the trauma or in other intense situations
- c. Amnesia or gaps in memory of personal history
- d. Cordoning off or blocking painful memories and feelings

5. Behavioral Issues

- a. Risk-taking or thrill-seeking (for example, fire-setting, sexual risk-taking)
- b. Difficulty understanding rules and complying with rules; oppositional behavior
- c. Maladaptive attempts at self-soothing (calming down), such as chronic masturbation, rocking, or self-injury
- d. Reacts aggressively towards others
- e. Excessively compliant, over-controlled, or rigid
- f. Reenacts traumatic past in day-to-day behavior or play (sexual, aggressive, etc.)
- g. Problems with impulse control

6. Cognitive & Thought Issues

- a. Has trouble planning and anticipating consequences; impulsive
- b. Unable to initiate or sustain goal-directed behavior or complete tasks
- c. Problems focusing and concentrating
- d. Problems coping with and adapting to change, and with processing new information
- e. Learning difficulties
- f. Language or perceptual delays
- g. Failure to learn from experience
- h. Social information processing problems, hyper-vigilant to threat, misperceiving negative, hostile cues, and misattributing the hostile intentions of others

7. Low Self-Concept

- a. Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, and being unlovable
- b. Persistent negative sense of self (for example, self-loathing, low self-confidence, low self-esteem)
- c. Feelings of guilt or shame
- d. Inability or unwillingness to plan for the future
- e. Lack of sense of efficacy in relationship to influencing caregivers
- f. Negative expectations about making a difference in one's life and future

Copyright © 2016, Northwest Media, Inc.

This handout was developed in partnership with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. We thank NCTSN for their contributions. For more information see the "Effects of Complex Trauma" at <http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/complex-trauma/effects-of-complex-trauma> and "Symptoms and Behaviors Associated with Exposure to Trauma" at <http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma/Symptoms-and-Behaviors-Associated-with-Exposure-to-Trauma>