

## Introduction to Therapy

Navigating the aftermath of trauma can be a profoundly challenging journey, not just for the individuals directly affected but also for their families and support networks. Recognizing when to seek professional help is a critical step toward healing and recovery. Therapy plays a pivotal role in this process, offering a secure and confidential environment where individuals can openly discuss their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and challenges.

Therapy serves as a sanctuary for those grappling with the disruptive impacts of traumatic events on their thinking, mood, feelings, or ability to engage with others. The child may learn to understand their situation, be equipped with strategies to express themselves and cope with potentially stressful situations. Therapists also provide invaluable tools for managing difficult emotions, negative thoughts, and behaviors, facilitating a path toward healing and resilience.

### What is Trauma-Focused Therapy?

**Trauma-Focused Therapy** is a specialized approach that focuses on understanding the profound impact of traumatic experiences on a child's mental, behavioral, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. This therapy deeply explores the relationship between the trauma and the child's emotional and behavioral responses. Its primary aim is to equip children with the skills and strategies needed to better understand, cope with, and process the emotions and memories associated with traumatic experiences. The ultimate goal of trauma-focused therapy is to help children construct a healthier and more adaptive meaning of the experience in their lives.

### SAMHSA's Definition of Trauma-Focused Therapy

"A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

1. **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery
2. **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
3. **Responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
4. Seeks to actively resist **re-traumatization**."

For more information, click [HERE](#).

## **Benefits of Trauma-Focused Therapy**

Trauma-Focused Therapy can be beneficial to youth who have experienced a traumatic event . By engaging in trauma-focused treatment, your child can learn more about what he/she is experiencing, how to address the concerns, and develop healthier ways of coping. The following are a few examples of the benefits of trauma-focused therapy:

### **Learn About Trauma.**

Trauma-focused therapy offers a supportive environment for children and their families to understand normal reactions to trauma and its specific impact on the child and family. This learning process facilitates understanding of certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors occur, providing clarity and reassurance that they are not alone in their experiences.

### **Re-Establish Safety.**

A traumatic experience by definition results in a violation of the child's sense of safety. This includes violations of physical, emotional, psychological, and/or relational safety. A benefit of trauma-focused therapy is to assist your child in re-developing internal (emotional, psychological, relational) and physical (touch, the environment) senses of safety, through activities and discussions that target these domains.

### **Identify Triggers.**

This therapy helps children identify, understand, explore, and express the memories and feelings tied to their trauma. Often times, children may show reactions that appear to “come out of nowhere” or are out of proportion for an experience, but it may be that these are actually reactions to trauma reminders. Another benefit of treatment is teaching children to identify trauma reminders (triggers) and adjust their responses accordingly over time.

### **Develop Healthy Coping Skills.**

Sessions are designed to equip youth with skills and coping strategies to better respond to reminders and emotions associated with the traumatic event. These include anxiety management and relaxation techniques taught in ways that resonate with young individuals, fostering resilience and aiding in recovery from trauma.

### **Decrease in Traumatic Stress Symptoms.**

Working closely with a therapist, children can develop skills to reduce symptoms of traumatic stress and related mental health symptoms associated with trauma. Improvements may include reduced depression, anxiety, dissociation, and intrusive symptoms like flashbacks and nightmares.

### **Practice Trauma Processing or Integration.**

A key aim of trauma-informed therapy is empowering children to regain control over their past experiences by sensitively assisting them to re-narrate their stories. Over time, they have the opportunity to “process” or integrate their experiences into their daily lives and redefine their self-perception and worldview.

## Trauma-Focused Treatment Activities

There are a variety of different activities or strategies that are used within the trauma-focused treatment process. These trauma-focused activities may look different based on age, trauma experience, setting, or location. Therapists may use creative strategies and activities to address memories, emotions, or problematic behaviors associated with traumatic experiences as part of the therapy process. These are conducted in a way that is sensitive and unique to your child's experience and are often used in conjunction with relaxation skills.

## Types of Trauma-Focused Treatments

Many different types of trauma-focused and trauma-informed treatments exist today. These may also be referred to as ***trauma-focused interventions***. One intervention type is not "better" than another, but rather each was developed to meet the different needs of individuals and families. Trauma-focused treatments may look different based on age, trauma experience, setting, or location.

To find specific trauma-informed interventions based on your child's needs, visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network Empirically Supported Treatments and Promising Practices by clicking [HERE](#).

## How Do I Know if a Therapist is Trauma-Informed?

Currently, there are no state or national regulations defining "trauma-informed provider" or "trauma-informed therapist." However, some states are working toward "credentialing" or ensuring that clinicians have minimum education and training around trauma-informed practice. No matter where you live or what a professional's background may be, there are questions you can ask a therapist to learn more about his/her training and experience working with children exposed to trauma. Some questions you may consider asking include:

- What is your educational background (degree, professional title)?
- What are your specialties?
- How long have you been conducting therapy?
- What is your experience in working with youth who have experienced trauma?
- What is your approach to working with youth who have experienced trauma?
- Have you had any type of specialty training in the treatment of childhood trauma?
- Do you consider yourself a "trauma-informed therapist"? How?

For more tips on choosing a trauma-informed provider, visit SAMHSA's [Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma Specific Interventions webpage](#) or visit NCTSN's [Empirically Supported Treatments and Promising Practices webpage](#).