

Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)

Also referred to as TF-CBT, Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a program designed to help children who have experienced very difficult or frightening events that later impact their ability to live well. The program provides a road map for a therapist to follow as he or she works with the child and caregiver to treat the symptoms related to the trauma. Research shows that therapists who follow this road map are more effective in helping children and their caretakers reduce symptoms related to trauma.

Can TF-CBT Really Help?

TF-CBT has been PROVEN to help, particularly when a supportive caretaker is a part of treatment. Researchers have found that trauma symptoms including depression are dramatically reduced when a child and caretaker participate in TF-CBT.

How Do I Get My Child Into TF-CBT?

If your child is between the ages of 5 and 18, talk with your clinician to see if TF-CBT is appropriate for you. Participation in this program will require caretaker participation and attendance at weekly sessions. Caretakers who have participated in the program have found it helpful for themselves as well as for their children.

Caretakers will be asked to complete some survey forms. These are used to help us make sure that the treatment is working for your child. Results will be shared with you and your child at the beginning and the end of treatment. If you have questions about the program, please talk to your child's counselor.

What Are Trauma-Related Symptoms?

Children who experience trauma have many different responses. Some do not show symptoms at all for some time. Others show more obvious behavior changes including, but not limited to the following:

Crying
Bed wetting (after child has been potty-trained)
Anger outbursts, tantrums
Withdrawn behavior
Nightmares
Re-enacting the trauma in play
Distractibility

Regressive behaviors (thumb sucking, baby-talk)
Disturbance of sleep
Disturbance of appetite
Avoidance or fear of particular people or situations
Excessive daydreaming
Jumpy or easily startled

What Do We Mean By Trauma?

A traumatic event is one that causes a person significant distress, including behavioral and emotional changes that persist after the event has ended. Examples of traumatic events include:

Physical Abuse
Sexual Abuse
Domestic or Community Violence

Loss of a loved one
Experience of an accident

What Does the Treatment Include?

TF-CBT is a short-term treatment that lasts approximately 12-20 sessions and is broken into three major steps:

1. The child and caregiver learn about trauma and develop the skills that can make coping with a wide range of feelings easier. These skills include: relaxation training, identifying emotions, and getting rid of harmful thoughts. The counselor will also work with the parent to address the behavior problems that commonly occur when a child experiences trauma.
2. The child tells the story of his or her experience of trauma, and uses the newly learned coping skills to make telling the story easier. The child decides how to tell his or her story. Some children tell their story by creating a book. Others create art or music to communicate their message. During the weeks when the child is working on his or her story, the caregiver is given information on how to support their child in this process.
3. The child shares his or her story with the caregiver. This usually occurs after both the child and the caregiver have practiced with the therapist. The sharing of this story includes a discussion of the future and the creation of a safety plan. Typically the therapist, the caregiver and the child have a celebration to mark the completion of the program.

Please note: Treatment can be as short as eight sessions or can be extended based on the needs of the child and family.

Why Not Just Ignore the Experience and “Move On”?

Research has demonstrated that children whose trauma symptoms are left untreated can have difficulties later in life. Children with untreated trauma symptoms are at higher risk for:

Depression
Suicidal ideation
School problems
Cigarette, drug and alcohol abuse

Early sexual activity
Unhealthy eating
Relational problems