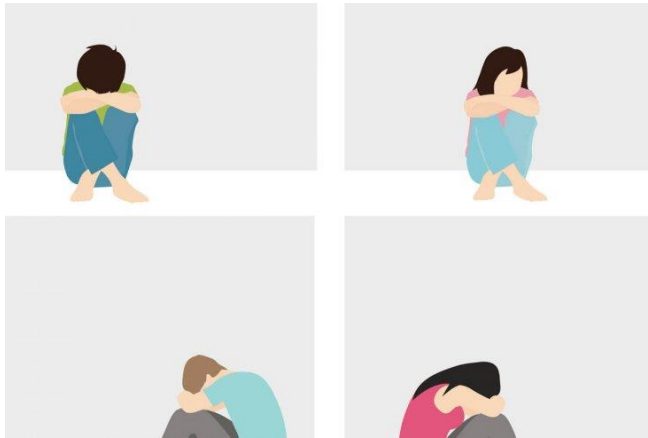


Trauma

Last week we looked at what trauma is; this week we are going to take a look at how children's experiences and the environment can affect them.



According to *'The Simple Guide to Child Trauma'*, children soak up what is going on all around them; they can even pick up on non-verbal situations, intense anxiety or fear in the home or in fact anywhere around them. This can make adults feel under pressure to be 'perfect'. However, more importantly, adults need to understand how children can become traumatised so that we can minimise the situations that cause trauma, and also

work with children who have experienced trauma to help them to recover and have a future that is not impacted by things they have seen, heard and experienced.

Anywhere there is fear in the environment can lead to a child being traumatised. For example, where there is anger, aggressive behaviours, uncaring or emotionally distant adults. Children will start developing ways to deal with the anxious atmosphere using coping mechanisms which could be all sorts of things such as risk-taking behaviours or emotionally shutting down.

Children can be traumatised if they have had a bad, scary, nasty or upsetting event and no adult to support them; through lack of care and emotional connection that enable them to blossom and grow; if they are, or have been, abused by an adult who is meant to be caring for them and they feel too afraid to tell anyone; if they seek out an adult to share their book, toy, news, worries or thoughts with and they are repetitively rejected or told to 'go away', shouted at, pushed away or told that they are irritating or annoying.

Children can be traumatised when they have a parent who struggles with mental illness; left crying in their cot for hours; lying for hours hearing sounds of shouting, bangs, screams and no idea what is happening; or when they are misunderstood as defiant when they actually feel confused by their own behaviour.

Children can be traumatised when bad things happen that could not be avoided; homes that are lost, natural disasters, families that are split apart, or lack of food or clothes or people who care for them. Sometimes children who feel invisible, as if no one cares about them, are suffering from trauma.

Traumatic experiences have a huge impact on children. Trauma changes the makeup of the brain and this in turn impacts the child's thoughts, behaviour, relationships, ability to learn or

focus, or their own emotional responses. Children will be unlikely to use words to describe these changes; at these times, the part of the brain responsible for communication shuts down. You often find children saying, 'I'm fine', when in fact they are unable to say how they are actually feeling.

It is at these times, when we need to tread carefully; traumatised children are usually scared about what has happened to them, and will often struggle to trust adults and will be confused about their feelings and behaviours. As adults, it is our job to help them understand so that they feel less awkward, ashamed or shocked.

As brains are plastic – able to change and adapt as a result of experience - the good news is that with the right care and support, the child's brain can heal and they can recover from experiences they have endured. *They can recover.*

Even if your child has not suffered trauma, there are many children around who have; the statistics are staggering – it is somewhere between 30 and 48% - be aware that behaviour is communication, and that a child behaving in an inappropriate way may actually be suffering from trauma.

Next week we will look at what we as adults can do when children have become traumatised.



Working together to keep our children safe and happy.