

# WELL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

## THE IMPACTS OF TRAUMA

### 10 EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

"Trauma survivors have symptoms instead of memories" (Harvey, 1990)

- 1 **DEPRESSION, IRRITABILITY, LOSS OF INTEREST, DECREASED CONCENTRATION, HOPELESSNESS**
- 2 **NIGHTMARES, FLASHBACKS**
- 3 **INSOMNIA, SLEEP DISRUPTION**
- 4 **EMOTIONAL OVERWHELM, NUMBNESS**
- 5 **SHAME & WORTHLESSNESS**
- 6 **HYPERVIGILANCE, MISTRUST**
- 7 **CHRONIC PAIN, HEADACHES**
- 8 **LOST SENSE OF IDENTITY**
- 9 **LITTLE OR NO MEMORIES**
- 10 **GENERALIZED ANXIETY, PANIC ATTACKS**

(ADAPTED FROM BRENNER & MARMER, 1998)

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We all know you can't live a life without going through some tough or trying situations. Do you ever wonder what makes someone traumatized as opposed to remembering a challenging experience from their past? As J. Harvey (1990) puts it, "Trauma survivors have symptoms, not memories." What he's saying is that trauma is held in our bodies, not in our minds as memories as the rest of our previous experiences are stored. When we recall traumatic circumstances, we feel it physiologically. In response, we react with defense mechanisms to protect us from the perceived risk or danger as though it was being relived in the moment.

Situations that lead to trauma are characterized by feeling unprepared to find safety or be in control. We feel defenseless or incapable of handling the perceived danger. These situations catch us off guard or are circumstances we don't feel equipped to tolerate or navigate. They trigger our fight, flight, freeze responses, designed to help us reach safer places and states. Those reactions "memorize" the details of the triggering situation selectively, based on data that our protection systems deemed relevant. They store those in our bodies, so when we recall the situation later on, they bring up the same physiological symptoms as the first time.

The effects of trauma, and how they show up, can vary. Some common symptoms

include nightmares or flashbacks, where our minds are attempting to process the fearful situation and create a storyline out of the chaos. We can wake up in a sweat with shallow, panicked breathing as though the original situation just happened. Trauma can impact our nervous system's ability to calm itself enough to move into quality sleep. We might find ourselves having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. It can show up in aches and pains such as tension headaches, stomach aches, chronic pain, or fatigue. It can impact our mood stability, causing depression, anxiety, or irritability. Trauma can also seep into our day-to-day mundane tasks by reducing our ability to concentrate or focus.

If you've experienced trauma, it can feel overwhelming to re-experience the symptoms, particularly when they pop up at random and inconvenient times. Finding ways to help your nervous system regulate can ease that over time. Your body needs to be reminded that the present is safe and the fight, flight, freeze response isn't currently helpful. We don't retrain our nervous systems by "remembering" the event, but rather by coaching our physiology into a state of calm. Trauma therapies like EMDR, Play Therapy or Somatic-based counseling can be helpful in guiding our bodies through a process of reorganizing traumatic experiences. ●

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Karen Peters

#### RESOURCE LINKS:

[Trauma/PTSD Book List](#)

[Signs of Trauma in Children resource](#)

[Helping Children Cope with Traumatic Events resource](#)