

Supporting trauma recovery for kids in OOHC



The majority of kids in out-of-home-care (OOHC) have experienced complex trauma. Complex trauma is a type of chronic trauma. It includes multiple traumatic events that begin at a very young age, perpetrated by primary caregivers. Kids need the adults in their lives to support their recovery from trauma.

How trauma affects kids

When kids experience trauma, it can affect them in ways including:

- **thinking** - they can find it more difficult to think clearly, concentrate and complete school work
- **feelings** - they may have difficulty managing strong emotions including anger, fear, sadness, shame, guilt and excitement
- **physical** - they may experience headaches, stomach upsets, problems with bladder and bowel control, nightmares, and difficulty sleeping
- **worldview** - they may believe that the world is not a safe place, and develop a poor sense of self
- **relationships** - they may have difficulty trusting adults and building positive relationships
- **re-experiencing** - they may experience survival responses such as fight, flight and freeze which are immediate, extreme and outside of their control.

Supporting recovery

With the right support, kids can and do recover from trauma. If you're supporting kids to heal from trauma, remember that the quality of their relationships is key. It will be difficult to use any intervention, tool or strategy successfully without a stable emotional connection. To build meaningful connections you can:

- be consistent; provide routines; do what you say you will; and follow through on promises
- provide kids with focused, one-on-one time each day - this can be as little as 5 to 10 minutes
- spend time really listening when kids speak, ensuring that distractions are kept to a minimum – turn off the TV and put down your phone
- help them identify and name their emotions

- help them to problem solve - don't always come up with solutions or solve their problems for them
- stay calm and neutral when responding to their emotional and behavioural difficulties
- give them choice and decision making opportunities - this provides them with a sense of control
- be aware of their survival responses and triggers - work with their support team to develop response strategies
- work with kids to develop their Managing Emotions Guides, and support them to implement the strategies they identify
- attend training to improve your knowledge, skills and confidence in caring for kids who have experienced trauma. Training such as *Healing from Trauma* is a great place to start.