

# Trauma Informed Guardian ad Litem

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# What are the types of childhood trauma?

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- According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, there is a range of traumatic events or trauma types to which children and adolescents can be exposed to such as:
  - Bullying
  - Community Violence
  - Complex Trauma
  - Disasters
  - Domestic Violence

# What are the types of childhood trauma?

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- Early Childhood Trauma
- Medical Trauma
- Physical Abuse
- Refugee Trauma
- Sexual Abuse
- Terrorism and Violence
- Traumatic Grief

# Complex Trauma

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Complex trauma describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events—often of an invasive, interpersonal nature—and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually occur early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child's development and the formation of a sense of self. Since these events often occur with a caregiver, they interfere with the child's ability to form a secure attachment. Many aspects of a child's healthy physical and mental development rely on this primary source of safety and stability.

-National Child Traumatic Stress Network

## Child's Ability to Form a Secure Attachment

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- Be a model of a positive, adult relationship to the child.
- Be a source of resilience for the child.
- Remember that you may be the only consistent adult in the child's life.

# Talking to a Child with Complex Trauma

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- The more complex the trauma that a child has experienced, the more distortion in thought the child will experience.
- Ask the child: Do you know we are meeting? Do you know why you are in foster care? Are you comfortable talking about it?
- Understand that a child is often great keepers of family secrets, and intensely loyal to their family.

# Talking to a Child with Complex Trauma

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- Collaborate with the child's therapist to discuss hard topics.
- Allow the child's therapist to be the sole individual "digging deep" into the facts and circumstances that have caused the complex trauma.
- Invite other members of the M.D.T. such as the CASA advocate to accompany you on visits to the child.

# Behaviors for a Child with Complex Trauma

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- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network tells us that a child with a complex trauma history may:
  - Be easily triggered or “set off” and is more likely to react very intensely,
  - Struggle with self-regulation and lack impulse control,
  - Lack the ability to think through consequences before acting,

# Behaviors for a Child with Complex Trauma

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- Seem “spacey,” detached, distance, or out of touch with reality, and
- Be more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as self-harm, unsafe sexual practices, and excessive risk-taking.
- In response to a child’s behavior, the child’s school or caregiver may believe the child has ADHD. However, ADHD and trauma share several characteristics.

## TRAUMA

- Irritability, quick to anger
- Increased arousal, edginess and agitation
- Avoidance or reminders of trauma
- Feelings of fear, helplessness, uncertainty, vulnerability
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Dissociation, feelings or unreality or being "outside of one's body"
- Continually feeling on alert for threat or danger
- Unusually reckless, aggressive or self-destructive behavior

## OVERLAP

- Difficulty concentrating and learning in school
- Easily distracted
- Often doesn't seem to listen
- Disorganization
- Hyperactive
- Restless
- Difficulty sleeping

## ADHD

- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Struggling to follow instructions
- Difficulty with organization
- Fidgeting or squirming
- Difficulty waiting or taking turns
- Talking excessively
- Losing things necessary for tasks or activities
- Interrupting or intruding upon others

# Cognition: Thinking and Learning for a Child with Complex Trauma

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- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Children tells us that a child with complex trauma may have difficulty:
  - thinking clearly
  - reasoning
  - problem solving
  - learning new skills
  - remaining focused due to reactions of trauma reminders
  - developing language and abstract reasoning skills

# Emotional Responses in a Child with Complex Trauma

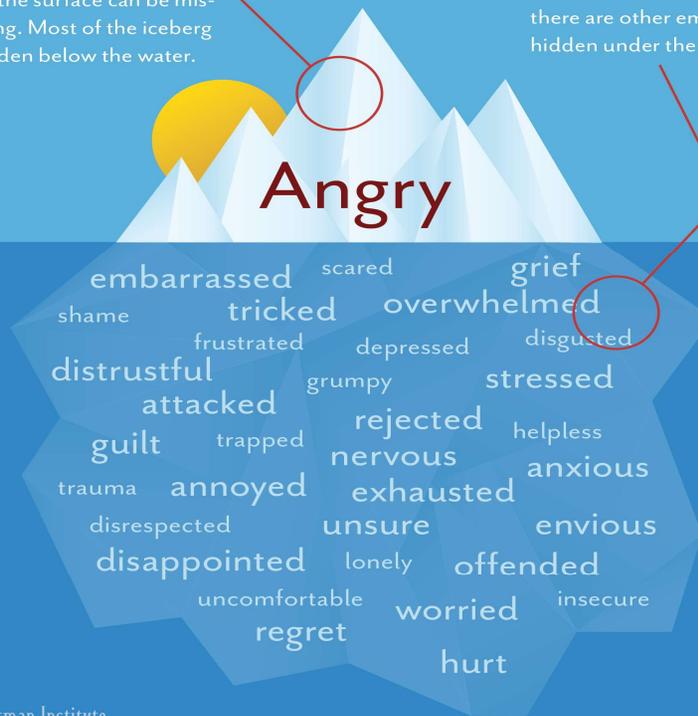
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- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network tells us that a child with complex trauma often:
  - Experience difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions;
  - Have limited language tools to express their feeling states;
  - Internalize and/or externalize stress reactions; and
  - Have emotional responses that may be unpredictable or explosive.

# Anger Iceberg

Icebergs are large pieces of ice found floating in the open ocean. What you can see from the surface can be misleading. Most of the iceberg is hidden below the water.

This is how anger works. Often when we are angry, there are other emotions hidden under the surface.



# Long-Term Health Consequences

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How does childhood trauma affect health across a lifetime?

[https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime?language=en&utm\\_campaign=tedspread&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_source=tedcomshare](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en&utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare)

**What do therapists want a Guardian ad Litem to know about representing a child with complex trauma?**

