



BEING A TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITY

WHERE IS “TRAUMA” STORED IN OUR BODY?

Childhood trauma can have a lifelong impact on children and young people’s mental and physical development. Let’s explore what happens to our minds and bodies after exposure to traumatic events.

What is emotional information?

Emotional expression is very important. Experts believe that emotions help us respond to threats by alerting our body to ‘fight’, ‘flight’ or ‘freeze’. Our body reacts the most when experiencing negative emotions (such as fear and stress) as these can keep us safe in dangerous situations. But, the feelings often do not go away after the situation has passed. These emotions become emotional information which stays in our bodies as trauma.

So, where are these negative emotions in our bodies?

Emotional information is stored through “packages” in our organs, tissues, skin, and muscles. These “packages” allow the emotional information to stay in our body parts until we can “release” it. Negative emotions in particular have a long-lasting effect on the body.

Here are some examples that help explain how our body interprets emotions:

- ✔ When we are angry, fearful, and anxious, we have increased activity in the chest, back, and upper body. This means our muscles become tense, and our heart beats faster.
- ✔ When we feel love and joy, it fills the entire body. These emotions have a positive effect on the body. They lower the risk for cardiovascular disease, lower blood pressure, enable better sleep and can improve the diet.

In other words, when children experience traumatic events they feel negative emotions like fear or anxiety. These emotions are then subconsciously stored in their body and mind and can cause symptoms such as panic attacks or a racing heartbeat.

These emotions can cause our brains to become hypervigilant and in a constant state of alert. People with traumatic experiences can be sensitive to sensory information. Certain smells, touch, sounds, tastes, and images remind them of a threat, and can impact how they think and act.

How can emotions harm your body?



How you can help

Help children and young people in your care release the negative emotions stored in their body:

- > Try to maintain a predictable and consistent environment with stable routines. This will help the child or young person feel safe and secure.
- > Explore calming strategies and mindfulness exercises that the child or young person enjoys. Patterned, repetitive, and rhythmic activities can also help. These include listening or dancing to music with a strong beat, jumping on a trampoline or doing a puzzle.
- > Always listen to the child or young person if they are retelling their experience. It is vital to give them time to cope with their emotions, accept what they say, and be curious. Try not to be intrusive or judgmental.
- > Gently help the child or young person to identify and understand their emotions. Reassure them that it is safe for them to express their feelings and that they have support.

Note: The terms ‘child’ and ‘children’ also refer to ‘young person’ and ‘young people’.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you’d like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Sources:

- > Hillei, A., Yaacov, T. & Alexander, T. (2012). Body Cues, Not Facial Expressions, Discriminate Between Intense Positive and Negative Emotions.
- > Nummenmaa L, Glerean E, Hari R, Hietanen JK. (2014). Bodily maps of emotions.
- > Source images: Freepik.com



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