

UNDERSTANDING INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

BEING
A TRAUMA
INFORMED
COMMUNITY

Lots of things are passed down through families, from one person to the next and the next...Christmas traditions, birthday celebrations. The effects of trauma can be passed down too.

Trauma is exposure to actual or threatened death, injury, neglect, and abuse or violence.

Trauma can be directly experienced or witnessed (seeing or hearing violent acts against yourself or someone else); or indirectly experienced (such as from a family member, friend or acquaintance). Indirectly experienced trauma is often referred to as 'vicarious' trauma.

The exposure can be a one-off incident or ongoing. Events such as a war, natural disasters, terrorism, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and child maltreatment and neglect can all result in trauma.

Traumatic experiences activate stress responses that can alter the way a person behaves and feels.

What is intergenerational trauma?

Intergenerational trauma is when the original traumatic experience is transferred from parents to children, and then grandchildren and so on. This is thought to be a result of learnt behaviour and alternations to internal workings with biological changes in the body due to stress (see Trauma Poster on Epigenetics).

For example, a child who witnesses the physical abuse of their mother once or many times, has experienced trauma. This can then develop into intergenerational trauma, which can influence how the child behaves in a relationship in the future, and how they parent their own children.



How can intergenerational trauma be identified?

Signs can be:

- > Difficulty with establishing and maintaining close and meaningful relationships.
- > Drug and alcohol misuse.
- > An inability to cope with normal life.
- > A sad mood and anxiety issues.
- > Anger that can be uncontrollable.

Good to ask:

- > What happened before that person was born?
- > Did their parents or grandparents experience trauma or a traumatic life?

Good news!

A person or a family who has experienced intergenerational trauma can recover and thrive. The following things can help in the recovery process:

- > A sense of belonging with unconditional love and acceptance - for example, a carer who is consistent, predictable and supports with routines.
- > A sense of belonging in a wider safe community with social engagement - for example, community hobby or interest groups, school, and the workplace.
- > Mindfulness activities to help re-build the brain and nervous systems.
- > Seeking services such as Child and Family Centres, Lifeline, General Practitioner (GP), and other professional therapeutic interventions.

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:

- > Van Der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score*. Viking Press USA
- > Gatwiri, K., Mcpherson, L., Cameron, N., Parmenter, N. (2019). *Research Briefing: Trauma Informed Care* [Report]. Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care; NSW
- > Source image: Freepik.com



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