

# INFORMATION PACKET

## TOPIC 3: Building A Safe Place

2014

(From the: Trauma Informed Caregiving for Resource Families Series)

### CREDITS:

Material originally used in the ACRF Rural Teleconference Series “Trauma Informed Caregiving for Resource Families and taken from the Participant Handbook developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network Curriculum for Resource Families

[http://nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/rpc/RPC\\_ParticipantHandbook\\_FINAL.pdf](http://nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/rpc/RPC_ParticipantHandbook_FINAL.pdf)



The following information packet contains several articles on the above topic. If you wish to receive training credit for reading this packet, please fill out the “Information Packet Questionnaire” at the back of this packet. Return the questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families for 1.0 hour of training credit. The articles are yours to keep for further reference.

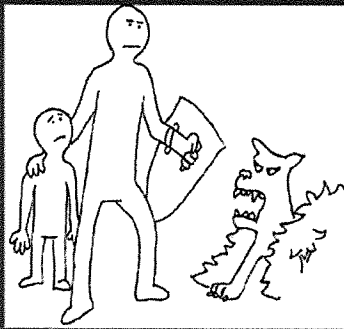
Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second Ave Suite 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
1-800-478-7307  
479-7307 (Fairbanks/North Pole)

[www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)

---

The Alaska Center for Resource Families, a project of Northwest Resource Associates, is under contract with the State of Alaska Office of Children’s Services to provide training and information to foster parents statewide.





Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

## Module 4: Building a Safe Place

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Essential Element 2



2. Help your child to feel safe.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### What Is Safety? (Group Activity)



Pronunciation: \ˈsāf-tē\

Function: Noun

From the Middle English *saufte*, from the  
Anglo-French *salveté*, *saufte*, from *salf*  
safe

Definition:

1) the condition of being safe from  
undergoing or causing hurt, injury, or loss

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2008).

Retrieved April 27, 2008 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/safety>

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Safety and Trauma



- Physical safety is not the same as psychological safety.
- Your child's definition of "safety" will not be the same as yours.
- To help your child feel safe, you will need to look at the world through his or her "trauma lens."

(Continued)

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Safety and Trauma (Continued)



Children who have been through trauma may:

- Have valid fears about their own safety or the safety of loved ones
- Have difficulty trusting adults to protect them
- Be hyperaware of potential threats
- Have problems controlling their reactions to perceived threats

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*When supper was over I saw that there were many biscuits piled high upon the bread platter, an astonishing and unbelievable sight to me. . . .*

*I was afraid that somehow the biscuits might disappear during the night, while I was sleeping. I did not want to wake up in the morning, . . . feeling hungry and knowing that there was no food in the house. So, surreptitiously I took some of the biscuits from the platter and slipped them into my pocket, not to eat, but to keep as a bulwark against any possible attack of hunger. . .*

*I did not break the habit of stealing and hoarding bread until my faith that food would be forthcoming at each meal had been somewhat established.*

—Richard Wright

Wright, R. (1945). *Black boy*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Promoting Safety



- Help children get familiar with the house and neighborhood.
- Give them control over some aspects of their lives.
- Set limits.
- Let them know what will happen next.
- See and appreciate them for who they are.
- Help them to maintain a sense of connection and continuity with the past.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Give a Safety Message



- Partner with the social worker or caseworker.
- Get down to the child's eye level.
- Promise to keep the child physically safe.
- Ask directly what the child needs to feel safe.
- Follow the child's lead.
- Let the child know that you are ready to hear what he or she needs.

(Continued)

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Give a Safety Message (Continued) (Group Activity)



Take concerns seriously:

- Empathize.
- Acknowledge that the child's feelings make sense in light of past experiences.
- Be reassuring and realistic about what you can do.
- Be honest about what you do and don't know.
- Help your child to express his or her concerns to other members of the child welfare team.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Explain Rules



When explaining household rules:

- Consider the child's history.
- Don't overwhelm the child.
- Emphasize protection.
- Be flexible when you can.

---

---

---

---

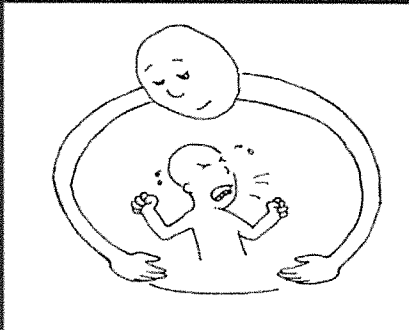
---

---

---

---

## Be an "Emotional Container"



(Continued)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I started cursing at the foster mom. I wanted her to lose control. I figured that sooner or later she would say something that would hurt me. I wanted to hurt her first . . .*

*Later, I felt depressed. I knew I'd acted out of control. When I get angry I don't even realize what I do and I hurt the people around me. . . .*

*I feel sad that I'm not good about expressing myself. I feel like a walking time bomb. I hope I can find a foster mom who can handle my anger, and help me take control of myself.*

—A. M.

Am I too angry to love? Represent. Nov/Dec 2004.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/Nov/Dec2004/FCYU-2004-11-10.htm>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Be an “Emotional Container” (Continued)



- Be willing—and prepared—to tolerate strong emotional reactions.
- Remember the suitcase!
- Respond calmly but firmly.
- Help your child identify and label the feelings beneath the outburst.
- Reassure your child that it is okay to feel any and all emotions.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Manage Emotional “Hot Spots”



- Food and mealtime
- Sleep and bedtime
- Physical boundaries, privacy, personal grooming, medical care

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I made a list of things my sister and I eat so [our new foster mother] could buy our food, but she didn't buy exactly what we wanted.*

*She bought the wrong kind of cereal, she put ginger in the juice even though I told her not to, and the bread was some damn thick . . . bread.*

*All of these little things made me furious. I believed she thought it didn't matter what I told her, and that she could treat us how she wants.*

—A. M.

Am I too angry to love? Represent, Nov/Dec 2004.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCIU-Features/Nov/Dec2004/FCIU-2004-11-10.htm>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Food and Meals (Group Activity)



- Be aware of the child's history.
- Accommodate food preferences, if possible.



- Set consistent meal times.
- Involve child in planning and making meals.
- Keep mealtimes calm and supportive.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I woke up in a panic. I couldn't stay asleep. [My foster mother] came into my room. "Honey, what's wrong?"*

*I couldn't even tell her how I felt. I couldn't get the words out to say what was the matter.*

—A. M.

Learning to love again. Reprinted July/Aug 2006  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYL-Features/JulyAug2006/2006-07-04b.htm>

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

17

---

---

---

---

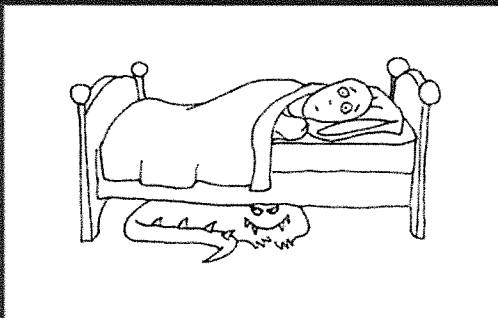
---

---

---

---

## Sleep and Bedtime (Group Activity)



(Continued)

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Sleep and Bedtime *(Continued)*



- Help your child to “own” the bedroom.
- Respect and protect your child’s privacy.
- Acknowledge and respect fears.
- Set consistent sleep and wake times with predictable, calming routines.
- Seek help if needed.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I don't think there was a time when I wasn't abused as a child. In order to survive the abuse, I made believe that the real me was separate from my body. That way, the abuse was happening not really to me, but just this skin I'm in.*

*Still, my body sometimes betrayed me. Crying when I wanted to remain strong, becoming tired and refusing to obey my commands to stay awake, and, most horribly, physically responding to sexual advances. It seemed to me like my body had a mind of its own. I hated the thought of sexual contact, yet my body would respond to it, even when it was unwanted.*

—C. M.

My body betrayed me. Represent. Sept/Oct. 2003.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/SeptOct2003/FCYU-2003-09-24.htm>

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Physical Boundaries



Children who have been neglected and abused may:

- Never have learned that their bodies should be cared for and protected
- Feel disconnected and at odds with their bodies
- See their bodies as “vessels of the negative memories and experiences they carry, a constant reminder not only of what has happened to them but of how little they are worth”

Pughe, B., & Philpot, T. (2007). *Living alongside a child's recovery*.  
London, UK: Kingsley Publishers.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Physical Boundaries *(Continued)* (Group Activity)



- Respect your child's physical boundaries.
- Make the bathroom a safe zone.
- When helping younger children bathe, ask permission before touching and be clear about what you are doing and why.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

22

---

---

---

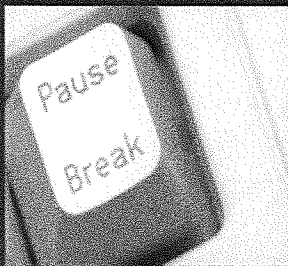
---

---

---

---

---



**Let's take a break!**

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

23

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

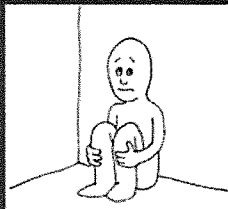
---

## Trauma Reminders



People, situations, places, things, or feelings that remind children of traumatic events:

- May evoke intense and disturbing feelings tied to the original trauma
- Can lead to behaviors that seem out of place, but may have been appropriate at the time of the original traumatic event



NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Trauma Reminders' Impact



Frequent reactions to trauma reminders can:

- Keep a child in a state of emotional upset
- Be seen by others as overreacting to ordinary events
- Result in avoidance behaviors
- Isolate the child from peers and family
- Make a child feel ashamed or afraid of going "crazy"

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

25

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Identifying Trauma Reminders



- When your child or adolescent has a reaction, make note of:
  - When
  - Where
  - What
- When possible, reduce exposure.
- Share your observations with your child's caseworker and therapist.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

26

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What's the Reminder? (Group Activity)



- What situation or event did the child react to?
- Based on the child's trauma history, what was it a reminder of?
- What else could serve as trauma reminders? (Try to think of at least three for each child.)

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

27

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Coping with Trauma Reminders: What Parents Can Do



- Ensure safety
- Reorient
- Reassure
- Define what's happened
- Respect and normalize the child's experience
- Differentiate past from present

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

28

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Coping with Trauma Reminders: What NOT to Do



- Assume the child is being rebellious
- Tell the child he or she is being dramatic or "overreacting"
- Force the child to face reminder
- Express anger or impatience

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

29

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Coping with Trauma Reminders: What Children Can Do—SOS



- **S**top
  - Stop and take several long, deep breaths.
- **O**rient
  - Look around and take in immediate surroundings.
  - Make note of physical reactions (breathing, heartbeat, etc).
- **S**eek Help
  - Use a "stress buster" to help calm down.
  - If needed, call a trusted friend or reliable adult.

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

30

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## SOS: Identifying Stress Busters



- Activities (running, playing a particular song)
- Things (a toy, a stuffed animal, a picture, a favorite blanket, a particular food)
- Places (a spot in the yard or a park, a room)
- People
- A specific thought, phrase, or prayer

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

31

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Coping with Trauma Reminders (Group Activity)



How did the resource parents . . .

- Reorient the child and ensure safety?
- Help the child understand what happened?
- Differentiate past from present?
- Give the child new options for coping with a reminder?

Would you have done anything differently?

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

32

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I woke up in a panic. I couldn't stay asleep. [My foster mother] came into my room. "Honey, what's wrong?"*

*I couldn't even tell her how I felt. I couldn't get the words out to say what was the matter.*

*"You're safe here, OK? If anyone tries to get through the door to hurt you I will get them."*

*I was glad that she was so aggressive—it made me feel like I could loosen up and let someone else protect me. I didn't have to worry anymore.*

—A. M.

Learning to love again. Represent. July/Aug 2006.  
Available at <http://www/youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/JulyAug2006-07-04b.htm>

NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

33

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Managing Emotional “Hot Spots”: Tips for Resource Parents

---

## Emotional “Hot Spots”

Safety is important for all children, but it is particularly crucial for children who have experienced trauma. For these children, the world has often been a harsh and unpredictable place. Before such children can heal, they need to feel safe and believe that there are adults in their lives who can offer safety and security.

Feeling oriented is an important part of feeling safe. To a child, coming into a new home—even the home of relatives—may feel like being sent to another planet. Some times or situations may be particularly emotionally charged for children who have experienced trauma, and may trigger a child to act out, struggle over control, or become emotionally upset. These emotional hot spots include:

- Mealtimes or other situations that involve food
- Bedtime, including getting to sleep, staying asleep, and being awakened in the morning
- Anything that involves physical boundaries, including baths, personal grooming, nudity, and privacy issues

## Food and Mealtimes

Being fed by a caregiver is one of the first and most significant interactions we have with the outside world. It is how we come to understand whether—and how—our needs will be met.

For many traumatized children, food and the experience of being fed are emotionally charged. Meals may have been inadequate or unpredictable. In some families, mealtimes may have been scenes of verbal or physical abuse. In other families, food may have been the only source of comfort. In others, children may have been forced to fend for themselves, scrounging food from dumpsters or begging from strangers.

The foods we eat, how we prepare them, and how we behave during mealtimes are also partly determined by culture. Foods that a

I made a list of things my sister and I eat so [our new foster mother] could buy our food, but she didn't buy exactly what we wanted.

She bought the wrong kind of cereal, she put ginger in the juice even though I told her not to, and the bread was some damn thick . . . bread.

All of these little things made me furious. I believed she thought it didn't matter what I told her, and that she could treat us how she wants.

A. M., former foster child

Am I too angry to love? *Represent.* Nov./Dec. 2004.

Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/NovDec2004/FCYU-2004-11-10.html>



child may equate with safety and comfort may seem foreign or even unhealthful to you. How we handle mealtimes can send traumatized children powerful messages about:

- Your interest in nurturing them
- How your family works
- Whether they really belong

You can help make mealtimes “safer” for the children in your care by:

- Accommodating their dietary preferences as much as possible
- Giving children a chance to help plan and prepare meals
- Ensuring that at least some of their favorite foods are available
- Setting consistent mealtimes
- Having meals together as a family
- Keeping mealtimes calm and supportive

## **Sleep and Bedtime**

Bedtime and sleeping may be especially difficult for traumatized children. A child suffering from traumatic stress reactions may have trouble sleeping. When children who have been through trauma close their eyes at night, images of past traumatic events may appear. When they do fall asleep, nightmares may awaken them. Being in bed can also make children feel especially vulnerable or alone. They may have been sexually abused while in bed, or thrown into bed at the end of a parent’s raging and physical abuse.

For this reason, traumatized children may avoid bedtime. They may also find waking up in the morning difficult. Children who have grown up in unstable, unpredictable environments may feel that no sooner did they feel safe enough to go to sleep than they were being asked to wake up and face the day again.

Helping a traumatized child to feel safe and protected when going to bed, sleeping, or waking can be challenging. But there are steps you can take to make these potentially frightening times safer for your children:

- Reassure children that their rooms are their personal space and will be respected by all members of the family.
- Always ask permission before sitting on a child’s bed.
- Set a consistent bedtime to give children a sense of structure and routine.
- Set up predictable, calming bedtime rituals and routines.

- Encourage a sense of control and ownership by letting children make choices about the look and feel of the bedroom.
- Acknowledge and respect children's fears—be willing to repeatedly check under the bed and in the closet, show them that the window is locked, provide a nightlight, and provide assurances that you'll defend them against any threat.
- Let children decide how they want to be awakened. An alarm clock might be too jarring for children who are always on alert for danger. How about a clock radio tuned to their favorite station? A touch on the shoulder?
- Make sure children know exactly what to expect each morning by creating dependable routines so they can start the day reassured of their safety.

Children who are having a great deal of trouble with bedtime and sleep may need help from a therapist specifically trained in trauma treatment.

## Grooming and Personal Boundaries

Many children who have experienced physical and sexual abuse have learned to see their bodies as the enemy, or as something that needs to be hidden and made as unattractive as possible. Seemingly positive things like a hug, having their hair brushed, or a hot shower may have very different meanings for children whose bodies have been violated. So we need to be very sensitive to our children's trauma history when it comes to situations that involve physical boundaries, including personal grooming, privacy, and touch.

Children who have been abused and neglected may never have learned that their bodies should be cared for and protected. Sexual and physical abuse can leave children feeling disconnected from—or even at odds with—their physical selves, with no sense of ownership, comfort, or pride in their bodies. Instead, their bodies may feel like “constant reminders not only of what has happened to them but of how little they are worth.”<sup>1</sup>

I don't think there was a time when I wasn't abused as a child. In order to survive the abuse, I made believe that the real me was separate from my body. That way, the abuse was happening not really to me, but just this skin I'm in.

Still, my body sometimes betrayed me. Crying when I wanted to remain strong, becoming tired and refusing to obey my commands to stay awake, and, most horribly, physically responding to sexual advances. It seemed to me like my body had a mind of its own. I hated the thought of sexual contact, yet my body would respond to it, even when it was unwanted.

C. M., former foster child

My body betrayed me. *Represent.* Sept./Oct. 2003.

Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/SeptOct2003/FCYU-2003-09-24.htm>

All too often, children come into care with teeth that are desperately in need of cleaning, hair so tangled it's hard to get a brush through it, or clothes that are soiled or ill-fitting. They may be resistant to grooming, to bathing, to anything that involves seeing or touching their bodies.

Helping such children to feel safe enough to respect and care for their bodies will take time and patience. Steps you can take include:

- Respect children's physical boundaries—don't assume a child wants to be hugged; take cues from the child before initiating physical contact.
- Introduce older children to all the workings of the bathroom, and make it clear that their time in the bathroom is private and that no one will be walking in on them during bath time.
- When helping to bathe younger children, be careful to ask permission before touching and to be clear about exactly why, how, and where you will be touching them.
- Give young children the time to splash around, play with water toys, and enjoy the positive sensations of bath time.

## References

- <sup>1.</sup> Pughe B. & Philpot T. (2007). *Living alongside a child's recovery*. London, UK: Kingsley Publishers.

# The Importance of Touch:

## Caring for Young Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

---

Touch is essential to healthy development, yet for children who have been abused, it can prompt more anxiety than comfort. Children—particularly very young children—who have survived physical abuse may come to associate all human touch with pain, and may find it difficult to accept physical affection and comfort from their caregivers. Those who have experienced sexual abuse may not understand that touch doesn't have to be sexual.

It can take time for traumatized young children to accept—and give—touch in a way that is comforting, appropriate, and that reinforces their self-worth and self-esteem. It may take many, many small experiences of pleasure and safety to counteract the big experiences of trauma and pain they have endured. Below are some simple steps to take when caring for children who have difficulty with physical contact.

“Touch seems to be as essential as sunlight.”

—Diane Ackerman

*A Natural History of the Senses* (1990).  
New York: Vintage Books

- **Be consistent and reliable in meeting the child's physical needs.** Every time these needs are met—whether for food, a clean diaper, or getting back to sleep after waking—the child will begin to make new associations. The more you can anticipate the child's needs before he or she cries, the more the child will be able to “take in” the wonderful new experience of being cared for.
- **Create a soothing environment.** Because loud noises can be strong trauma reminders for babies and young children who have been physically abused, it's important to keep the environment as soothing as possible: soft music, soft light, and soft, calm voices. Potential trauma reminders such as an alarm clock going off or even a phone ringing should be avoided as much as possible.
- **Avoid surprising the child.** Sudden or unexpected contact is all the more scary for traumatized babies, so it's important to describe what you are doing before you do it: “I am going to change your diaper now” or “Here is your nice bottle.” Though babies may not understand what you are saying, they will be calmed by the sound of a voice that is soft and soothing. Babies have also been shown to respond well to soft “shushing” noises.
- **Use texture and movement to soothe and calm.** Babies who are very distressed by human touch may still be comforted by the sensation of soft fabrics or plush toys. Giving children plush blankets or stuffed animals to cuddle can help them to get used to pleasant sensations against their skin, which you can then build on. Babies are also comforted by gentle swinging motions. Babies who cannot tolerate touch may benefit from being in a baby swing or simply rocked gently in a cradle or carriage.

- **Take it slow.** When it comes to touch, the first step may be to just be present in the child's room, sitting by the crib, and singing or talking to the child in a soft, calm voice. It may take many days or weeks of such "being present" before the child can tolerate even a simple touch, such as a gentle stroke of the arm. If the child avoids eye contact, don't force it. Wait for the child to initiate eye contact, and reinforce the action with a smile and comforting words or sounds.

The more "tuned in" we become to children's nonverbal signals, the more we will be able to build on their positive responses. For example, if you notice that a baby seems to calm down when sucking on her hand, you may be able to offer comfort simply by helping her get her hand to her mouth.

# Coping with Trauma Reminders

---

## What are trauma reminders?

Many children in the foster care system have been through multiple traumatic events, often at the hands of those they trusted to take care of them. **When faced with people, situations, places, or things that remind them of these events, children may reexperience the intense and disturbing feelings tied to the original trauma.** These “trauma reminders” can lead to behaviors that seem out of place in the current situation, but were appropriate—and perhaps even helpful—at the time of the original traumatic event. For example:

- A seven-year-old boy whose father and older brother fought physically in front of him becomes frantic and tries to separate classmates playfully wrestling in the schoolyard.
- A three-year-old girl who witnessed her father beating her mother clings to her resource mother, crying hysterically when her resource parents have a mild dispute in front of her.
- A nine-year-old girl who was repeatedly abused in the basement of a family friend’s house refuses to enter the resource family’s basement playroom.
- A toddler who saw her cousin lying in a pool of blood after a drive-by shooting has a tantrum after a bottle of catsup spills on the kitchen floor.
- A teenager who was abused by her stepfather refuses to go to gym class after meeting the new gym teacher, who wears the same aftershave as her stepfather.
- A two-year-old boy who had been molested by a man in a Santa Claus suit runs screaming out of a YMCA Christmas party.

## What happens when a child responds to a trauma reminder?

When faced with a trauma reminder, children may feel frightened, jumpy, angry, or shut down. Their hearts may pound or they may freeze in their tracks, just as one might do when confronting an immediate danger. Or they may experience physical symptoms such as nausea or dizziness. They may feel inexplicably guilty or ashamed or experience a sense of dissociation, as if they are in a dream or outside their own bodies.

Sometimes children are aware of their reaction and its connection to the original event. More often, however, they are unaware of the root cause of their feelings and may even feel frightened by the intensity of their reaction.

## How can I help?

Children who have experienced trauma may face so many trauma reminders in the course of an ordinary day that the whole world seems dangerous, and no adult seems deserving of trust. Resource parents are in a unique position to help these children recognize safety and begin to trust adults who do indeed deserve their trust.

It’s very difficult for children in the midst of a reaction to a trauma reminder to calm themselves, especially if they do not understand why they are experiencing such intense feelings. Despite



reassurance, these children may be convinced that danger is imminent or that the “bad thing” is about to happen again. It is therefore critical to create as safe an environment as possible.

**Children who have experienced trauma need repeated reassurances of their safety.** When a child is experiencing a trauma reminder, it is important to state very clearly and specifically the reasons why the child is now safe. Each time a child copes with a trauma reminder and learns once more that he or she is finally safe, the world becomes a little less dangerous, and other people a little more reliable.

### **Tips for Helping Your Child Identify and Cope with Trauma Reminders**

- **Learn as many specifics as you can about what your child experienced so you can identify when your child is reacting to a reminder.** Look for patterns (time of day, month, season, activity, location, sounds, sights, smells) that will help you understand when your child is reacting. Help your child to recognize these trauma reminders. Sometimes, just realizing where a feeling came from can help to minimize its intensity.
- **Do not force your child into situations that seem to cause unbearable distress.** Allow your child to avoid the most intense reminders, at least initially, until he or she feels safe and trusts you.
- When your child is reacting to a reminder, **help the child to discriminate between past experiences and the present one.** Calmly point out all the ways in which the current situation is different from the past. Part of the way children learn to overcome their powerful responses is by distinguishing between the past and the present. They learn, on both an emotional (feeling) and cognitive (thinking and understanding) level, that the new experience is different from the old one.
- **Provide tools to manage emotional and physical reactions.** Deep breathing, meditation, or other techniques may help a child to manage emotional and physical reactions to reminders. If you are unfamiliar with such techniques, ask a counselor to help.
- **Recognize the seriousness of what the child went through, and empathize with his or her feelings.** Don't be surprised or impatient if your child continues to react to reminders weeks, months, or even years after the events. Help your child to recognize that reactions to trauma reminders are normal and not a sign of being out of control, crazy, or weak. Shame about reactions can make the experience worse.
- **Anticipate that anniversaries of events, holidays, and birthdays may serve as reminders.**
- **With your child, identify ways that you can best reassure and comfort during a trauma reminder.** These might be a look of support, a reassurance of safety, words of comfort, a physical gesture, or help in distinguishing between the present and the past.
- **Seek professional help if your child's distress is extreme,** or if avoidance of trauma reminders is seriously limiting your child's life or movement forward.
- **Be self-aware.** A child's reaction to a trauma reminder may serve to remind you of something bad that happened in your own past. Work to separate your own reactions from those of your child.

## Stress Busters for Kids Worksheet

When. . .	What helps me feel calm and relaxed?
I get up in the morning	
I have to do something I don't like at school	
I am having a hard time concentrating	
I am worried or scared about something	
I am sad	
Something reminds me of something bad that happened	
There are too many people or too much noise	
It is too quiet or I am lonely or bored	
I am so excited I can't wait for something!	
I feel like moving around but I can't (in school or church maybe)	
In the evening, before bedtime	
I am in bed and can't sleep	
Some other time: (name it)	

# INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE

## TOPIC 3: Building A Safe Place

1.0 Hour

NAME: _____		PHONE NO.: _____	
<i>Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.</i>			
ADDRESS: _____		_____	
<i>Street or Post Office</i>		<i>City/State</i>	<i>Zip</i>
EMAIL: _____			
<input type="radio"/> <b>YES! I would like to receive ACRF email.</b> <i>(Includes Training Tracks Newsletter, training reminders and community events or training of interest for Resource Families)</i>			
Are you a foster parent?		<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO    If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: _____	
If NO, please check one:		<input type="radio"/> Pending Foster Parent <input type="radio"/> OCS <input type="radio"/> Birth Parent <input type="radio"/> Adoptive Parent	
<input type="radio"/> Residential Treatment Facility (License #: _____ )		<input type="radio"/> Agency: _____	
<input type="radio"/> Other <i>(please specify)</i> : _____			

***Please read the information packet. Then fill out this questionnaire and RETURN TO: ACRF, 815 Second Avenue Suite 101, Fairbanks, AK 99701. Or fax it to: 907-479-9666, you will be credited with 1.0 hour for completion of this worksheet.***

1. This packet presents concepts and ideas that may be useful to your foster parenting experience. Please list two (2) specific ideas or concepts which you learned or reaffirmed from reading this packet. Write a short sentence or two describing how you can use them in your family.

a)

b)

# **INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE**

2. List each title in this packet. In a few sentences for each article, summarize the main purpose or key points for each article in this packet.