

Supporting Children Affected by Trauma

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Children's lives are always marked by change. Most of the changes that occur in a child's life is positive and part of growing up, such as moving up to the next group in day care, starting school, or changing houses. Most of these changes are acknowledged as positive and often celebratory, however, there are times when an event in the child's life is traumatic and can shatter that sense of security. This can create enormous pressure and stress for childcare staff caring for a child who has experienced traumatic experiences. During this period of time the staff will be still aiming to include the child in to the service and provide an environment where the child can safely explore the world around them. The following tips are just a start to including a child who has experienced trauma. You will know and recognise many, if not all of them. The one main aim of the service should be to provide at least one safe and consistent environment for the child to be regardless of what occurs elsewhere.

Suggested Strategies

- **Work closely with all stakeholders in the child's life** – it is easier to establish a safe and consistent environment if all stakeholders are working together. Seek out key stakeholders of the other environments that the child attends i.e. school, teachers, parents/guardians to share ideas and strategies.
- **Remain focussed on your role** – i.e. providing quality inclusive childcare where a child can grow and develop. Leave other aspects to the specialists in their field.
- **Assess your program** – identify aspects of your program that triggers stressful behaviour by the child. Modify and change to decrease these triggers, e.g. is arrival time noisy?
- **Focus on relationship building through routines** –creating a stable and predictable routine such as arrival time, lets the child know that while lots of changes maybe occurring elsewhere here is a place that remains the same. Arrival time in OSHC can be very noisy and hectic so look at ways to quieten that time.
- **Children who have suffered from PTSD can enter a prolonged fantasy world** – it is important to “ground” the child in their environment, e.g. “No, you are not superman, you are at childcare/outside School Hours Care, let's go and do a drawing”.

- **Use distraction strategies to move the child away from that “fantasy world”** – e.g. guide the child to another activity that shows that you have thought about them especially “I have got some beautiful shapes in the water for you today.”
- **Support the child’s social development** – provide individual or small group activities that assist in recognising all children in the group and value their individual skills and differences, e.g. activities that require turn taking such as play card games like UNO or Fish. These activities can also focus on areas of the child’s interests.
- **Model appropriate social behaviour** – greet the child on arrival and departure, making eye contact and showing that you enjoy having the child in the group.
- **Provide calming activities** – create calming environments such as waterplay, bubble blowing, relaxation CD’s, quiet reading, quiet place for the child to retreat.
- **Be aware of your body language, level and tone of your voice** – when talking to children your body language conveys more of what you really mean than your words.
- **Initiate activities that encourages a child’s interest** – e.g. if a child shows interest in a topic or certain art/craft area provide these activities. Gain the child’s involvement by encouraging the child to assist in setting up these activities.

References:

- Greenman J. “*What happened to the world?*” Helping children cope in turbulent times.
Pademelon Press 2002 Australia
- Bilmes J & Welker T “Common Psychological Disorders in Young Children “ A Handbook for Child
Care Professionals Redleaf 2006 USA

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