

What is Traumatic Stress?

Many children experience traumatic events. Some of these experiences happen once in child's lifetime, whereas others are re-occurring. A significant number of children have experienced multiple traumatic events.

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems (NCANDS) glossary in Child Maltreatment 2006 (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm06/index.htm>) provides the backbone to the following categories of traumatic stress provided by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Core Clinical Characteristics form dated 9/2007):

Sexual Maltreatment/Abuse

Note: Sexual maltreatment/abuse refers to acts by an adult or older youth who is playing a caretaker role for the youth (e.g., parent, parent-substitute, babysitter, adult relative, teacher, etc.). Sexual contact/exposure by others (i.e., non-caretakers) should be classified as 'sexual assault/rape.'

- Actual or attempted sexual contact (e.g., fondling; genital contact; penetration, etc.) and/or exposure to age-in-appropriate sexual material or environments (e.g., print, internet or broadcast pornography; witnessing of adult sexual activity) by an adult to a minor child.
- Sexual exploitation of a minor child by an adult for the sexual gratification or financial benefit of the perpetrator (e.g., prostitution; pornography; orchestration of sexual contact between two or more minor children).
- Unwanted or coercive sexual contact or exposure between two or more minor children.

Sexual Assault/Rape

Note: Sexual assault/rape should include contact/exposure by perpetrators who are NOT in a caretaking role with the youth (sexual misconduct by caregivers should be recorded as 'sexual maltreatment/abuse.')

- Actual or attempted sexual contact (e.g., fondling; genital contact; penetration, etc.) and/or exposure to age-inappropriate sexual material or environments (e.g., print, internet or broadcast pornography; witnessing of adult sexual activity) by an adult to a minor child.
- Sexual exploitation of a minor child by an adult for the sexual gratification or financial benefit of the perpetrator (e.g., prostitution; pornography; orchestration of sexual contact between two or more minor children).
- Unwanted or coercive sexual contact or exposure between two or more minors.

Physical Abuse/Maltreatment

Note: Physical abuse/maltreatment refers to acts by an adult or older youth who is playing a caretaker role for the youth (e.g., parent, parent-substitute, babysitter, adult relative, teacher, etc.). Physical pain and/or injury by others (i.e., non-caretakers) should be classified as 'physical assault.'

- Actual or attempted infliction of physical pain (e.g., stabbings; bruising; burns; suffocation.) by an adult, another child, or group of children to a minor child with or without use of an object or weapon and including use of severe corporeal punishment.
- Does not include rough and tumble play or developmentally normative fighting between siblings or peers of similar age and physical capacity (e.g., assault of a physically disabled child by a non-disabled same-aged peer would be included in this category of trauma exposure).

Physical Assault

Note: Physical assault should include infliction of physical pain/bodily injury by perpetrators who are not in a caretaking role with the youth (such actions by caregivers should be recorded as 'physical maltreatment/abuse').

- Actual or attempted infliction of physical pain (e.g., stabbings; bruising; burns; suffocation.) by an adult, another child, or group of children to a minor child with or without use of an object or weapon and including use of severe corporeal punishment.
- Does not include rough and tumble play or developmentally normative fighting between siblings or peers of similar age and physical capacity (e.g., assault of a physically disabled child by a non-disabled same-aged peer would be included in this category of trauma exposure).

Emotional Abuse/Psychological Maltreatment

- Acts of commission against a minor child, other than physical or sexual abuse, that caused or could have caused conduct, cognitive, affective, or other mental disturbance. These acts include:
 - Verbal abuse (e.g., insults; debasement; threats of violence).
 - Emotional abuse (e.g., bullying; terrorizing; coercive control).
 - Excessive demands on a child's performance (e.g., scholastic; athletic; musical; pageantry) that may lead to negative self-image and disturbed behavior.
- Acts of omission against a minor child that caused or could have caused conduct, cognitive, affective or other mental disturbance. These include:
 - Emotional neglect (e.g., shunning; withdrawal of love).
 - Intentional social deprivation (e.g., isolation; enforced separation from a parent, caregiver, or other close family member).

Neglect

- Failure by the child victim's caretaker(s) to provide needed, age-appropriate care although financially able to do so, or offered financial or other means to do so. Includes:
 - Physical neglect (e.g., deprivation of food, clothing, shelter).
 - Medical neglect (e.g., failure to provide child victim with access to needed medical or mental health treatments and services; failure to consistently dispense or administer prescribed medications or treatments (e.g., insulin shots)).
 - Educational neglect (e.g., withholding child victim from school; failure to attend to special educational needs; truancy).

Domestic Violence

- Exposure to emotional abuse, actual/attempted physical or sexual assault, or aggressive control perpetrated between a parent/caretaker and another adult in the child victim's home environment.
- Exposure to any of the above acts of perpetrated by an adolescent against one or more adults (e.g., parents, grandparent) in the child victim's home environment.

War/Terrorism/Political Violence Inside the U.S.

- Exposure to acts of war/terrorism/political violence on U.S. soil (including Puerto Rico). Historical examples include attacks of 9-11, Oklahoma bombing, and anthrax deaths.
- Includes actions of individuals acting in isolation, e.g. sniper attacks, school shootings if they are considered to be political in nature.

War/Terrorism/ Political Violence Outside the U.S.

- Exposure to acts of war/terrorism/political violence, including living in a region affected by bombing, shooting, or looting other than in the U.S.
- Accidents that are a result of terrorist activity (e.g., bridge collapsing due to intentional damage, hostages who are injured during captivity) outside the U.S.

Illness/Medical

- Having a physical illness or experiencing medical procedures that are extremely painful and/or life-threatening.
- The event of being told that one has a serious illness.
- Examples of illnesses include cancer or AIDS. Examples of medical procedures include changing burn dressings or undergoing chemotherapy.
- Does NOT include medical injuries that would otherwise be classified under Injury/accident (e.g., a child who is burned in a fire would be designated as experiencing an accident/injury trauma; however, if they then had to undergo repeated, painful dressing changes they would also qualify for illness/medical trauma).

Injury/Accident

- Injury or accident such as car accident, house fire, serious playground injury, or accidental fall down stairs.
- Does NOT include injury or accident caused at the hands of another person who is intending harm of any type (e.g. a child who falls down the stairs after a parent pushes him would be classified under physical maltreatment/assault, even if the parent didn't intend for the push to lead to the fall).
- Key concept here is "Unintentional."

Natural Disaster

- Major accident or disaster that is an unintentional result of manmade or natural event, e.g. tornado, nuclear reactor explosion.
- Does NOT include disasters that are intentionally caused (e.g., Oklahoma City Bombing, bridge collapsing due to intentional damage), which would be classified as acts of terrorism/political violence.

Kidnapping

- Unlawful seizure or detention against the child's will.
- May include kidnapping by non-custodial parent as well as by stranger.

Traumatic Loss or Bereavement

- Death of a parent, primary caretaker or sibling.
- Abrupt, unexpected, accidental, or premature death or homicide of a close friend, family member, or other close relative.
- Abrupt, unexplained and/or indefinite separation from a parent, primary caretaker, or sibling, due to circumstances beyond the child victim's control (e.g., contentious divorce; parental incarceration; parental hospitalization; foster care placement).

Forced Displacement

- Forced relocation to a new home due to political reasons. Generally includes political asylees or immigrants fleeing political persecution. Refugees or political asylees who were forced to move and were exposed to war may be classified here and also under war/terrorism/political violence outside U.S.
- Does NOT include immigrants who move voluntarily (e.g., moving due to poverty of home country), or families who are evicted.
- Does NOT include homelessness.
- The key concept here is "Political."

Impaired Caregiver

- Functional impairment in at least one of child's primary caregivers that results in deficient performance of the caretaking role (i.e., inability to meet the child's needs).
- Impairment means that caregiver(s) were neither able to provide children with adequate nurturance, guidance, and support nor attend to their basic developmental needs due to their own mental illness, substance abuse, criminal activity, or chronic overexposure to severe life stressors (e.g., extreme poverty, community violence).
- Impairment may be due to various causes (e.g., medical illness, mental illness, substance use/abuse, exposure to severance life stressors (e.g., extreme poverty, community violence))
- If impairment results in additional trauma (e.g., neglect, emotional abuse/psychological maltreatment), BOTH 'impaired caregiver' and the more specific type of trauma should be reported.

Extreme Personal/Interpersonal Violence (not reported elsewhere)

- Includes extreme violence by or between individuals that has not been reported elsewhere (hence, if the child witnessed domestic violence, this should be recorded as "domestic violence" and NOT repeated here).
- Intended to include exposure to homicide, suicide and other similar extreme events.

Community Violence (not reported elsewhere)

- This category is intended to capture episodic or pervasive violence in the youth's community that have not been captured in other categories.
- Include extreme violence in the community (i.e., neighborhood violence)
- Exposure to gang-related violence should be recorded here (though specific incidents of gang-related violence (e.g., homicide, assaults) should also be recorded under those more specific headings.

School Violence

- This category is intended to capture violence that occurs in the school setting and that has not been reported in other categories.
- It includes, but is not limited to: school shootings, bullying, interpersonal violence among classmates, and classmate suicide.