



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Childhood Trauma and Resilience Committee

Measurement of Child Trauma & Adversity: Terminology and Resources

The wide-ranging impacts of childhood trauma and adversity on health and development are well documented. Accordingly, there is interest across many youth-serving sectors to measure exposure to and effects of trauma and adverse experiences with the goal of informing prevention efforts, intervention and treatment plans, resource allocation, and public policy. Having a fuller understanding of a person or group's exposure to trauma and adversity can lead to more appropriate resources and services meant to promote resilience and well-being. **The measurement of childhood trauma and adversity is a complex topic, however, and a number of important factors should be considered when designing and implementing such initiatives.** This guide provides an introduction to key terminology and offers resources for individuals or organizations interested in further information on this topic.

Terminology

- **Trauma Screening:** Screening involves a brief, focused set of questions meant to identify whether a person has been exposed to specific events, is experiencing behavioral/physical health reactions to those events, and/or may need additional assessment or intervention services. Screening may be conducted universally or within identified subgroups. (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018).
- **Trauma Assessment:** Trauma-informed and trauma-focused assessments are more comprehensive than screenings and often involve gathering information across several key domains of functioning through clinical and/or forensic interviews, standardized instruments, and/or observations. Goals of such assessments may be to understand the nature, timing, and severity of traumatic events, to characterize and monitor the functional or developmental effects of those events, and to guide intervention planning and resource linkages. (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).
- **Trauma Surveillance:** Public health surveillance involves systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to track exposure to risk factors and health conditions – such as trauma and its consequences – in a population. Whereas screening and assessments guide individual-level responses, surveillance data are used for planning, implementation, and evaluation of trauma-informed practices at the community, state, or national level (CDC, 2018).

Considerations and Cautions

Questions about a person's experience of traumatic events are sensitive and must be handled with care. Before launching any program to measure trauma, adversity, and related content in youth, carefully consider the goals along with the potential benefits and risks of such work. Any plan to screen or assess for individual trauma should include strategies to ensure the respondents' psychological and physical safety, plans for timely follow-up on disclosures, and protections to safeguard privacy and confidentiality. Respondents should be made aware of how the information will be used in developmentally appropriate formats and language. Consult with key stakeholders – including specialists in trauma and public health, as well as representatives from the population of interest – throughout the design, development and implementation process.

Additional Resources

The following resources offer further guidance around measurement of trauma and adversity, including screening and assessment tools designed specifically for use in children and families:

- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
 - [The Resilience Project: Clinical Assessment Tools](#)
 - [Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences and Other Types of Trauma in the Primary Care Setting](#)
- Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute
 - [Health Care Toolbox – Tools You Can Use: Assessment](#)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway
 - [Screening & Assessment of Child Trauma](#)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
 - [Violence Prevention – Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)
 - [Surveillance Resource Center](#)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)
 - [Beyond the ACE Score: Perspectives from the NCTSN on Child Trauma & Adversity Screening and Impact](#)
 - [Screening & Assessment Resource Hub](#)