

## Advice for Professionals and Frontline Workers

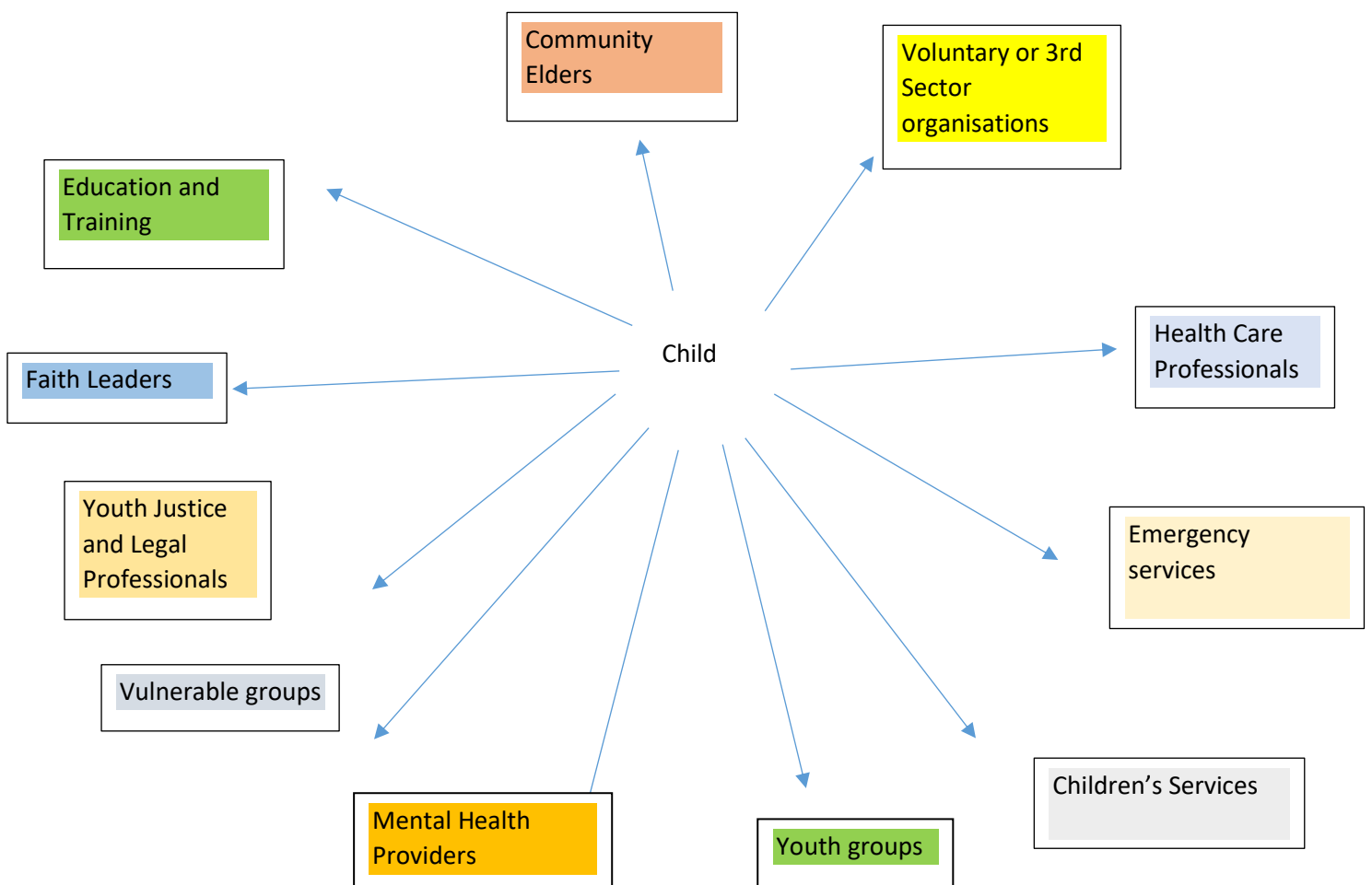
*Trauma and the impact of trauma on children and young people is a National Public Health issue. Each and every contact with a child or young person, no matter how brief, is a precious opportunity to impact positively on a child's recovery and promote healing.*

### What you can do to help

There are many things that Professionals and Frontline Workers can do to help and support an infant, child or teenager who has experienced trauma. An adult who is trusted, available, sensitive and nurturing can promote a sense of safety and predictability and importantly offers the hope of healing and recovery.

### Professionals and Frontline Workers

There are multiple, daily opportunities to impact positively on a child or young person's emotional wellbeing and help build resilience and promote healing. (\*\*Diagram is just a quick representation – not the final thing\*\*)



For some young people, School is the only place where they feel safe and have the opportunity to be surrounded by trusted, available and nurturing adults.

Rather than questioning 'what is wrong' with a young person, it is important to question 'what has this young person been through' and 'what can I do to help this young person to recover and heal?' Trusted relationships can act as a protective buffer to the effects of trauma, aid recovery and help build resilience in infants, children and young people.

## The Four 'R's

### Recognition, Reassurance, Routines and Regulation

It is important for Professionals and Frontline workers to be able to recognise the common reactions to trauma in children and young people. Helpful and healing responses include offering reassurance, establishing routines and helping a young person to 'regulate'. Supporting recovery involves being a predictable and nurturing presence, promoting structure, offering realistic hope, encouraging socially connections and helping young people to develop coping skills like 'grounding'. Self-Care is important when you are a front line worker with children and young people who have been impacted by traumatic events.

**The four 'R's are Recognition, Reassurance, Routines and regulation**

#### Recognition

It is important to be able to recognise how trauma can affect children and young people. Traumatic Stress symptoms can appear differently in Infants, Primary and Secondary School age children and Young People – ([see Link](#)).

- Disrupted Sleep and nightmares
- Thinking about the traumatic event all the time
- Avoiding people, places, activities, smells, objects or any reminders of the trauma
- Feeling scared and 'on guard'
- Reminders of the trauma may be 'triggering' and cause distress
- Reduced Concentration and the reduced ability to retain information can impact on learning
- Not wanting to go to school
- Feeling a mixture of emotions including anger, sadness, shame or guilt
- Experiencing physical symptoms like headaches or sore stomachs
- Re-experiencing the trauma through flashbacks or nightmares as if the trauma is still happening
- Re-enacting the traumatic experience can also be through words, play or social interactions
- Being more 'clingy'
- Being more irritable
- Saying negative things about themselves
- Behaving like a younger child – socially, behaviourally or cognitively
- Loss of former independence
- Reckless or impulsive behaviours

- Expressing suicidal thoughts or self-harming
- Recognise that disruptive behaviours can be driven by traumatic stress reactions.

## Reassurance

### There are many things you can do to help a Child or Young Person

- **Be available and Listen.** Provide the space, gentle encouragement and patience to children and young people to talk or communicate through art or play. Validate thoughts and feelings by ‘tuning in’ and being ‘present’ in the moment.
- **Be mindful of any possible triggers for young people and think about any possible environmental adjustments that can be made to make a child feel safer.** This could be by making sure you are not going to be disturbed, having posters and images with hopeful messages displayed and thinking about how children are greeted at the ‘front door’ of organisations.
- **Offer calm reassurance.** This can be simple like ‘you can talk to me any time, you are safe, I am here for you’. Remind them of all the people who care about them. This promotes a sense of safety and security.
- **Correct any misinformation about the traumatic event.** This should be delivered in simple language which is appropriate for your child or young person’s age and understanding.
- **Limit exposure to traumatic reminders on the media.**
- **Be especially caring and supportive.**
- **Speak to Parent’s, Carers (and when appropriate other involved Professionals)** if you have any concerns so they can also provide appropriate support.
- **Parents, carers and siblings may also be experiencing traumatic stress symptoms** so use the same ‘Trauma informed’ approach consistently with all family members.
- **It is important to adopt a cultural curiosity** so that resources within children, families, communities are embraced as key to building resilience and an important part of the healing process
- **Adopting cultural humility** involves simple things like making sure we say and spell children’s names correctly. We need to make an extra effort to understand individual backgrounds, and nationality.

## Routines

- **Be predictable and consistent** with what you say and how you support a child or young person. Maintain routines as usual.
- **Promote routines – at home, in school and in the wider community around mealtimes, exercise and social activities**
- **Promote a healthy balanced diet.**
- **Promote regular exercise** (Rhythmic, repetitive activities help children who are feeling highly anxious and distressed to feel calmer).
- **Promote the importance of good sleep routines.** Encourage daytime exercise, eat at regular mealtimes, encourage relaxing activities to ‘wind down’ throughout the evening, avoiding

caffeine containing or energy drinks, avoid screen time in the evening and eating late at night.

- **Encourage time for fun.**
- **Where learning is affected in school or college,** additional home –school communication and support may be needed

## Regulate

**Help a child or young person calm their stress response.** When highly stressed, ‘grounding’ strategies can be effective at helping to bring children and young people back to the ‘here and now’. By returning to the real world, stress is thereby quickly reduced. Here are some examples.

- **Rhythmic, repetitive activities** are calming and help children who are feeling highly anxious and distressed to feeling calmer. Running, walking, skipping, drumming, trampolining, dancing, throwing a ball, singing, colouring, building or doing art projects can all help.
- **The 5-4-3-2-1 exercise** –encourage a child or young person to notice and say out loud
  - 5 things that you can see.
  - 4 things that you can feel.
  - 3 things that you can hear.
  - 2 things that you can smell
  - Say one positive thing about yourself.
- **Other activities.** For younger children blow bubbles and notice their shape and colour. Use Mindful colouring books noticing both colours and design.
- **Learning to relax by mindful meditation.** Sit in a relaxed and comfortable position then focus on your breathing as you breath in and out. If your mind wanders bring your attention gently back to your breath.
- **Belly breathing.** Adult and child can do this together – matching each other’s breathing patterns. Put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest and say ‘copy me’. Slowly breathe in from your stomach (imagine it expanding like a balloon) and slowly breathe out (as the balloon deflates).
- **Use positive self-talk and model realistic hopeful thinking.** Encourage young people to use positive self-talk such as ‘I am strong, I am loved and I am special’.
- **Encourage peer support and friendship.** Feeling emotionally connected and supported are effective buffers and protective when we experience stress. Belonging to a community or group with a shared purpose eg School Orchestra, Football team or Youth Group promotes self-confidence.
- **Support children and young people to problem solve and self soothe.** Listen carefully to any ideas from children and young people. This could be as simple as drawing a picture for a favourite teacher or taking the dog for a walk. This helps develop self-esteem and gives a greater sense of control and choice to a child or young person.
- **Support children and young people to make choices** and make sure they know their contributions are important and recognised.
- **In School it might be helpful to identify a particular adult and a particular place for a child or young person to go if they feel overwhelmed.** Inconspicuous Classroom passes can be helpful.

## **Secondary Traumatic Stress in Professionals and Frontline Workers**

In order to be able to meet a child's needs, Professionals and Frontline Workers need to tend to their own self-care as an 'unregulated' adult cannot provide the support that a traumatised child or young person needs.

Adults who work with traumatised children and young people and may hear about traumatic experiences indirectly can be at risk of developing secondary Trauma - also called 'vicarious Trauma' or 'Compassion Fatigue'. Secondary Traumatic stress symptoms can affect emotional wellbeing (feeling numb or detached, overwhelmed or hopeless), physical wellbeing (lacking in energy) or behaviour (for example affecting sleep or using self-destructive coping mechanisms).

There are things that you can do to minimise your risks of developing secondary trauma and increase your resiliency to the effects of secondary trauma.

### **Looking after yourself.**

It is important to be aware of the potential of developing Secondary Traumatic Stress symptoms.

Prevention strategies to reduce the risk and improve individual resilience include having opportunities for supervision, mentoring or buddying at work. Being self-aware is important, having a good work-life balance, obtaining adequate sleep and exercise, reaching out and being connected to friends, family members and the wider community is helpful. Develop coping skills such as mindfulness, anxiety management and grounding strategies help to self-regulate and to self-soothe. If needed, access wellbeing resources such as at work, via your General Practitioner or the Voluntary sector.