



Assessment of Complex Trauma Information for Non-Mental Health Professionals

Not all children who've gone through traumatic experiences demonstrate the multiple functional impairments associated with complex trauma. The following questions can help determine whether to refer a child/family for more comprehensive assessment:

- Has the child experienced early and repeated exposure to overwhelming events in the context of a caregiver/family setting or in the community?
- Is the child having difficulty regulating or controlling behavior, sometimes appearing hyperactive, engaging in risk behaviors, or having difficulties with complying with rules? (There may be a diagnosis of ADHD treated with limited success).
- Is the child having difficulty with sustaining attention, concentration or learning?
- Is the child showing persistent difficulties in his/her relationships with others?
- Does the child have difficulty regulating bodily states and emotions, including problems with sleep, eating, sensory processing, and/or difficulties with regulating or identifying/expressing feelings?
- Does the child have multiple mental health diagnoses without any one sufficient diagnosis explaining his/her problems?

Professionals involved in a child's life, such as teachers, pediatricians, and those in the juvenile justice system, can play an important role in helping children receive trauma-focused assessment or services. There are a variety of resources, including brief screening tools, available to assist in this process of determining the need for more in-depth assessment or trauma-focused treatment. Some of these resources address child traumatic stress more generally, while others have been developed specifically to highlight the effects of complex trauma. Some examples include:

- *Trauma Screening Checklist: Identifying Children at Risk.*
This one-page screening tool, with versions for school-aged children and children aged 0-5, assesses exposure to a range of types of trauma as well as the impact of trauma in multiple domains (behavior, feelings, and relationships). This tool was developed by an NCTSN center and is designed for use primarily in Child Welfare settings.
- *NCTSN Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators.*
This resource, available in English or Spanish, provides suggestions for educators, including guidance on when to make a referral for additional help for a child. Fact sheets describe the potentially wide-ranging psychological and behavioral impact of trauma for children of different ages and include case examples of children with complex trauma.
- *NCTSN Bench Card for the Trauma-informed Judge.*
This quick reference is designed to provide judges with guidelines to help them make decisions based on the emerging scientific findings in the traumatic stress field. The card includes a list of questions to assess whether trauma-informed services are warranted, including a reminder to assess for multiple or prolonged trauma exposure.