

UNDERSTANDING STRESS vs. TRAUMA



NCTSN
The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

Stress and trauma are both experiences that affect emotions but they aren't exactly the same. While they're related, each has its own causes, effects, and timelines. Understanding the difference between stress and trauma is important for recognizing what kind of support or intervention is needed. It allows caregivers, educators, and providers to respond more effectively and helps make sure people get the right kind of care for what they're experiencing.

STRESS

Stress is your body's natural response to **pressure**. It is a state of **worry** or **tension** caused by a **difficult** or **challenging situation**.

CHILDREN

- Moving to a new school
- Taking tests
- Making new friends
- A new sibling arriving
- Arguing with friends

ADULTS

- Work deadlines
- Dealing with coworkers
- Taking exams
- Parenting challenges
- Moving to a new city



TRAUMA

A traumatic event is a **frightening, dangerous, or violent** event that poses a **threat** to a **person's life** or **bodily integrity**.

EXAMPLES OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

- Abuse and neglect
- Disasters and terrorism
- Family or community violence
- Traumatic separation
- Serious accidents

Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens life or physical security of a loved one can also be traumatic. This is **important for young children** whose **sense of safety** depend on the **perceived safety** of their **parents** and **caregivers**.

