

Children, Adolescents and Trauma

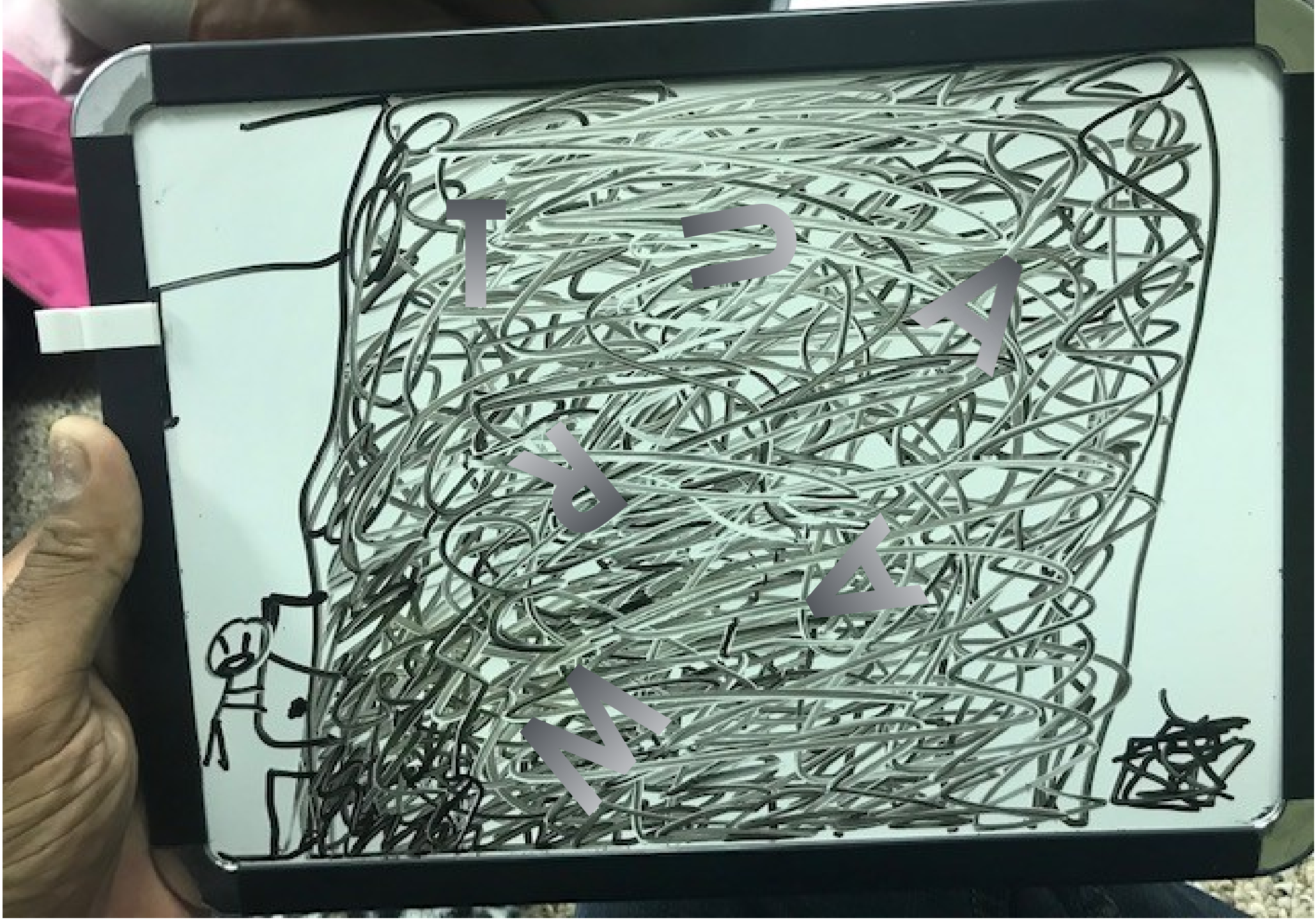
TRAUMATIC EVENTS – DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND OR ACCEPT.

MANY CHILDREN FEEL FRIGHTENED AND CONFUSED.

FORTUNATELY, MOST CHILDREN, EVEN THOSE EXPOSED TO TRAUMA, ARE QUITE
RESILIENT.

TRAUMA – in simple terms

- ▶ Emotional Response
- ▶ Dysregulation to an event or stressor that is problematic
- ▶ i.e., accident, death, natural disaster, illness, etc...
- ▶ Waiting room waiting for results (blood test, COVID results, etc...)
- ▶ Typical stages that follow are denial and shock
- ▶ Long term – unpredictable emotions surface (i.e., sound of sirens in Mtown)
- ▶ Flashbacks, strained relationships
- ▶ Physical symptoms – headaches, nausea, stomach aches, etc...
- ▶ These are normal and part of the traumatic process BUT....
- ▶ Prolonged emotions take a toll if not dealt with appropriately



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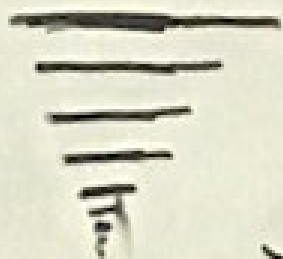
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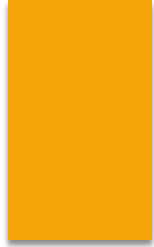
Rain





Scared y cat









Risk Factors reported

- ▶ Risk factors for greater problems in children - experiencing isolation, parents' wellbeing and mental health, and children's pre-existing mental health.
- ▶ Isolation (**social distancing**) through home confinement has changed children's behavior ("cabin fever")
- ▶ An increase in symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as greater behavior difficulties

Protective Factors

Create a supportive environment where children feel safe asking questions and believe their concerns are being heard (increase in School based mental health, parents)

Help kids cope with stressful events and experiences which reduce the risk of lasting emotional difficulties.

There is no "right" or "wrong" way to talk with children about these events. Suppression leads to depression.

Reactions of children post-trauma

- ▶ Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- ▶ Sadness, depression, hyperactivity
- ▶ Irritability (possibly due to fatigue)
- ▶ Having no feelings at all or feeling numb
- ▶ A lack of energy or feeling exhausted all the time
- ▶ Appetite concerns
- ▶ Trouble concentrating or feeling confused
- ▶ Thinking no one else is having the same reactions
- ▶ Headaches, stomachaches or other body pains
- ▶ Children can become clingy, fearful, have tantrums, or resume behaviors such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking
- ▶ Kids may get into fights, socially isolate, or have trouble with schoolwork
- ▶ SA becomes an option with ETOH, Vaping, Rx meds, cannabis, etc... in order to cope

TOOLKIT for children and adolescents

- ▶ Let children know there are people helping keep the community safe. It's a good opportunity to show children that when something scary happens, **there are people to help.**
- ▶ **Limit exposure to television and social media** content about the disaster; repeated exposure to frightening or intense images increase distress.
- ▶ **Maintain routines** at home and school as much as possible
- ▶ Spending family time together increases feelings of safety and provide helpful opportunities to talk/share.
- ▶ Ensure they have regular meals and **get good sleep every night.**
- ▶ Educate them to avoid using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to manage distressing emotions.
- ▶ **Find healthy ways to relax, such as music, reading, sports, and other hobbies.**
- ▶ Stay connected with friends, family, classmates and neighbors to give and receive support. Helping one another aids in healing.
- ▶ **Use words and concepts children can understand.** Gear your explanations to the child's age and understanding.
- ▶ Make time and encourage kids to ask questions.
- ▶ Don't force children to talk about things **unless and until they're ready.**
- ▶ **Give children honest answers and information.** Children will usually learn if you're making things up, which can diminish their trust in you

TOOLKIT for children and adolescents

- ▶ Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. **Asking the same question over and over may also be a way for a child to ask for reassurance.**
- ▶ **Acknowledge and validate the child's thoughts, feelings and reactions.** Let them know that you think their questions and concerns are important and appropriate.
- ▶ Children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about their own safety and the safety of immediate family members, friends and neighbors.
- ▶ Be reassuring, but **don't make unrealistic promises.**
- ▶ Help children find ways to express themselves. **Some children may want to talk about their thoughts, feelings or fears. Others prefer to draw pictures, play with toys, or write stories or poems to help them cope.**
- ▶ Be aware of how you respond to the tragedy and talk about it with other adults. **Children learn from watching parents and teachers. 83% is modeled**
- ▶ Children who have experienced trauma or losses in the past may be more vulnerable to **prolonged or intense reactions.** These children may need extra support and attention.
- ▶ **Monitor for physical symptoms, including headaches and stomachaches. Many children express anxiety through physical aches and pains. An increase in such symptoms without apparent medical cause may be a sign that a child is feeling anxious or overwhelmed.**
- ▶ A child may need **additional help** with sleep disturbances, intrusive thoughts or worries, preoccupation with concerns about the event, recurring fears about death, diminished school performance, or aggression.