



PARENT TOOLKIT

Trauma



Children who have experienced trauma — including abuse, neglect, loss, or significant disruption — may have challenges with emotional regulation, behaviour, attachment, and learning. This toolkit provides strategies to help children feel safe, understood, and supported.

Understanding Trauma

- Trauma affects the brain, body, and emotions, often impacting attention, memory, and behaviour.
- Common signs include:
 - Anxiety, fear, or hypervigilance
 - Aggression, withdrawal, or emotional outbursts
 - Difficulty trusting adults or peers
 - Sleep disturbances or nightmares
 - Regression in skills or behaviour
- Recognising behaviours as responses to trauma rather than deliberate misbehaviour is key.

Building Safety & Trust

- **Consistent routines** provide predictability and security.
- **Clear expectations** reduce anxiety about rules and boundaries.
- **Reliable, calm presence**: respond calmly even in challenging moments.
- **Validate feelings**: “I can see that was really scary for you.”
- **Physical reassurance**: hugs or gentle touch, if the child finds it safe.

Supporting Emotional Regulation

- Teach **calming strategies**: deep breathing, mindfulness, yoga, or stress balls.
- Use **emotion coaching**: help your child identify, name, and express feelings safely.
- Create a **safe space** where the child can go to regulate without judgment.
- Model calm, steady behaviour; children often co-regulate through adults.

Managing Behaviour

- Understand challenging behaviour as **communication**.
Ask: “What need is my child expressing?”
- Offer **choices** to give a sense of control.
- Reinforce **positive behaviours** with praise and attention.
- Avoid punitive approaches; use natural and logical consequences instead.

- Break tasks into **manageable steps** to prevent overwhelm.

Supporting Social & Peer Relationships

- Build social skills gradually through **structured, predictable interactions**.
- Practice turn-taking, empathy, and sharing with role-play or small groups.
- Provide guidance for navigating emotions in friendships.
- Celebrate successes and progress in social interaction.

Managing Anxiety & Triggers

- Identify triggers (noise, conflict, sudden changes) and prepare your child with **warnings or visual cues**.
- Use **social stories** or visual schedules for new or challenging experiences.
- Support grounding techniques: 5-4-3-2-1 senses exercises, movement, or tactile items.
- Encourage safe expression of fears through drawing, writing, or play.

Tools & Approaches

- **Trauma-informed parenting programmes:** ARC (Attachment, Regulation, Competency), Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), Theraplay®
- **Visual schedules and charts** to support routine and predictability

- **Emotion coaching charts** (Zones of Regulation or emotion thermometers)
- **Sensory regulation tools:** weighted blankets, fidget toys, soft lighting

Organisations & Support

- **Action for Children** – Advice and services for children who have experienced trauma.
- **NSPCC** – Guidance, helplines, and resources for parents and carers.
- **The Anna Freud Centre / Parent Helplines** – Supports children's mental health and trauma-informed parenting.
- **Theraplay® and ARC** – Programmes focused on strengthening attachment and emotional security.
- **Local CAMHS teams** – Assessments, therapy, and interventions for children with complex emotional needs

Supporting Yourself as a Parent

- Parenting a child who has experienced trauma can be emotionally demanding.
- Seek peer support or parent networks.
- Practise self-care: short breaks, mindfulness, or therapy for yourself.
- Recognise your own emotional triggers and practice co-regulation.

Children who have experienced trauma often show behaviours that can be confusing or challenging, but these are **signals of unmet needs and protective responses**. With a safe environment, consistent care, and trauma-informed strategies, children can build resilience, emotional regulation, and trust. Your presence, understanding, and patience are transformative.