

## What is Trauma?

**Trauma** is a single or series of events or a set of circumstances that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope appropriately. Events that are considered traumatic will involve feelings of fear or danger and threatened or actual physical, mental or emotional abuse.

The effects of these **Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs**, are often long-lasting and may lead to negative and unhealthy behaviors in adulthood. As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk of negative outcomes later in life.

Children who experience trauma may also experience negative impacts relating to their education. Trauma may lead to increased school absences and decreased reading levels and school performance.

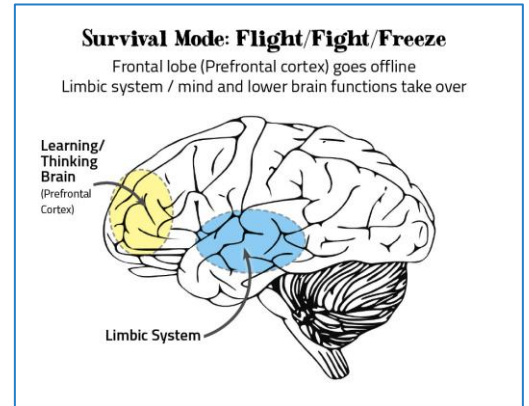
## Traumatic Events

A traumatic event may be a single episode or could happen repeatedly over a period of time. Trauma is considered cumulative, as the effects of trauma on a child usually worsen if they are continually exposed to traumatic events. Some examples include:

- Sexual or physical abuse
- Neglect or abandonment
- Life-threatening illness or death of a family member or caregiver
- Incarcerated family member
- Accident
- Natural Disasters, like hurricanes and floods
- Medical problem and staying in the hospital
- Victim or Witness of Domestic violence
- Homelessness or temporary housing
- Victim or Witness of violence in the community or at school



A body's natural response to any stress is **fight, flight, or freeze** which causes the nervous system to go into an elevated state and then returning back to its natural state. When a child has experienced **toxic stress** (trauma) however, the body perceives the elevated state as normal.



**Triggers**, or “threat-cues”, are situations that may set off a reaction by a child who has experienced trauma. Triggers may include loud noises, criticism, demeaning tone of voice, or activities that involve particular memories.

As a teacher, you may be able to notice **trigger warnings**, or situations that signal possible triggers. If a child is restless, short of breath, shaking, crying, using aggressive language, or clenching their teeth or fists, they may be particularly prone to reacting to triggers.

**Effects of Trauma**

Students who experience trauma may exhibit specific behaviors in the classroom. These effects may compromise developmental milestones of a child and often differ between students in lower and upper elementary grades.

Behaviors Indicative of Exposure to Trauma in Children, by Elementary Age Group	
<i>Preschool Students (Ages 3-5)</i>	<i>Elementary Students (Ages 6-12)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Separation anxiety or fear caregiver will not return</li> <li>● Regression of mastered skills (e.g. language, problem solving)</li> <li>● Tiredness from difficulty sleeping</li> <li>● Absenteeism</li> <li>● Overreactions to loud noises, physical contact, sudden movements</li> <li>● New fears</li> <li>● Questions about death or dying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Anxiety or worry for safety of self and others</li> <li>● Decreased focus and concentration</li> <li>● Withdrawal from activities</li> <li>● Angry outbursts and aggression</li> <li>● Absenteeism or declining school performance</li> <li>● Inappropriate response to social cues</li> <li>● Difficulty with authority</li> </ul>