



# Understanding Trauma and Helping Recovery

**Anne Wilson, our Head of Development, lifts the lid on trauma.**

**In our workshops, Foster and Kinship Carers often tell us their greatest challenge is knowing how to manage children's extreme behaviours (as a result of trauma) and help them recover.**

A trauma is a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience. It often involves a sense of intense fear, terror, or helplessness. A child or a young person can be traumatised by one overpowering event or many events over time.

## Where does it come from?

It can help to understand that trauma may go back to adverse experiences in early childhood, and that something in the present has triggered the trauma memory. Children often cannot remember the details. A seemingly benign event in the present (such as a perfume smell or a voice) can trigger

trauma memories. When this happens, children may experience emotional and physiological responses similar to those experienced when the trauma first occurred, such as flashbacks or sudden panic attacks. The behaviour is a reaction to the trauma memory and is often referred to as resurfacing trauma.

## How does Trauma show itself?

Trauma often emerges through behaviours, some of which can be extreme.

Carers may see behaviours which are far outside the normal range displayed by their child and disproportionate to what has happened. It may not always be possible to know the trigger. Carers may also find it hard to understand their children's behaviours - running away, locking themselves in their rooms, becoming violent (especially just now in lockdown when they may be more pronounced).



## Trauma Workshops

**At Children's Health Scotland our Trauma Workshops look at practical approaches to support those affected by trauma, including Kinship Carers themselves. They have been designed to help you understand what trauma is, how it is caused and what the impact can be on the health and wellbeing of the children and young people in your care.**

It can help carers to understand the needs and rights of children and young people in care, whilst helping them to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to support healing and recovery. We take the time to look past behaviours to see and understand the whole picture. We regard children affected by trauma as in need of help and ask the question: What's happened to you? rather than What's wrong with you?

**Our workshops explore many of the following in greater detail:**

### 1. Comfort, compliments hugs and smiles

Sometimes in the confusion of family life and especially if there is tension or challenge of any sort, it can be difficult to practise some of these. With COVID-19 restrictions lifting now is the time to hug and smile and give comfort where you can.

### 2. Blankets and hankies

Blankets can wrap a child up tight so that they feel held, safe and comforted - as do babies when they are wrapped up. You can even buy heavier, weighted blankets to promote sensory integration. Hankies could be given to a child as they leave you to go to school as a transitional object. It reminds them of you until you are reunited.

### 3. Partings and reunions

These are always important so make a thing of them and celebrate when you get back together again.

### 4. Balloons

After a bereavement, launch a helium balloon with a little ticket attached to the string with a message to the loved one on it.

### 5. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. While mindfulness is something we all naturally possess, it's more readily available to us when we practise on a daily basis.

### 6. Breathing

Just taking a few deep, calm, breaths can have a good calming effect. Look at our spring 2021 magazine for more ideas on breathing exercises.

### 7. Music

Sally Magnusson developed the concept of a play list of favourite tracks or ones which had special meaning for people who had lost their memory. Try making your own play list which has a special meaning for you.

### 8. Imagery

Images have the power to bring back memories or take you back to a favourite place. Try making a photograph album with your own special images.

### 9. Memories

You may have heard of a Memory Box. It does not have to be for someone who has died and can in fact be for a missing parent or anyone else and can contain anything from a football ticket to a photograph of a person - any object which reminds you of them.

### 10. Kindness Jars

You can put kindness suggestions in a jar. For example, make tea, clear up, go shopping. Family members take it in turns to pick a card from the jar and either request that or offer to do that for someone in the family.



For more information or to arrange a training session, please contact: Anne Wilson, Head of Development at Children's Health Scotland. Telephone 07485 462 435 or email: [anne.wilson@childrenshealthscotland.org](mailto:anne.wilson@childrenshealthscotland.org).

**Children's Health Scotland delivered and Understanding Trauma and Helping Recovery Webinar as part of the KC Week box set! Follow this link to find out more. <https://kinship.scot/kinship-care-week-2021/>**