

## CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE MYTHS AND FACTS

### Myth

Young Children don't remember traumatic experiences if they occurred early in life. Since they can't remember or talk about trauma, it won't affect them.

### Fact

Research shows that trauma impacts everyone who experiences it, even tiny infants. When children older than 28 months experience trauma, they retain verbal recall of the event. Children younger than 28 months have behavioral recall, later seen in play, drama and reenactments.

### Myth

It is better to forget bad things that have happened and instead concentrate on the good things that are happening. If children keep talking about something traumatic, try to help them forget about it, or distract them by saying something funny.

### Fact

If children are discouraged from talking about trauma, they often become preoccupied and feel alone with their worries. No one who is preoccupied can learn new things. Therefore, if children cannot talk about and integrate their traumatic experiences, they will have difficulty taking in new experiences. They may even appear learning disabled

### Myth

If a child refuses to talk or be responsive, he or she is just being stubborn.

### Fact

Some children who have been traumatized feel overwhelmed by their own inner experiences or feelings, and become withdrawn and detached from their "here and now" experiences. At those moments, they may be unable to respond.

### Myth

Traumatized children always appear timid and fragile and are easily managed in a classroom.

### Fact

While traumatized children may at times be timid and withdrawn, they may also become quite volatile, undergoing panic attacks and flashbacks - even violent outbursts - that make them difficult to manage.

### Myth

If a child is acting out in hurtful way, he or she is being willful and can choose to stop the bad behavior.

### Fact

Children who have been traumatized often identify with those who have traumatized them to such an extent that they feel compelled to “do unto others” what was done to them. They need an adult’s help to stop their vengeful behavior; before they can stop themselves, they need help to feel their own hurt.

### Lessons We Are Learning

We must consider exposure to violence as a core area of early childhood programming.

We must learn about the developmental, individual-difference, psycho-social and environmental variables that influence each child’s response to exposure to violence.

We must support children and families through *Relationship-based* interventions and services.

We must attend to the needs of the helper. We must convey a sense of hope, even growth, in the face of crisis.

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Source: **Helping Children and Families Exposed to Violence**

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