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BY JOLENE

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LATEST SPECIAL NEEDS PRODUCTS

10 Causes Of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder In Children

No one wants the words “post-traumatic stress disorder” and “children” to appear in the same sentence. But recent events like the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting are reminders that children as well as adults can be exposed to events that cause this debilitating but highly treatable mental illness.

Previous posts in this series explained [why I advocate for children with post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#)

[\(http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/04/19/confessions-of-a-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-advocate/\)](http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/04/19/confessions-of-a-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-advocate/), explored [5 myths and misconceptions about PTSD in children](#) (<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/07/17/5-myths-and-misconceptions-about-children-and-post-traumatic-stress-disorder/>), and [defined both trauma and PTSD](#) (<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/11/08/what-is-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-in-kids/>) from a child’s point of view.

The Causes Of PTSD In Children

Today’s post explores some of the causes of PTSD in kids. While you read through the list, keep in mind the definition of trauma given by [Margaret Vasquez, a clinical traumatologist](#) (<http://freedomscallingu.wordpress.com/about/>), who was traumatized in childhood and treated as a young adult. In [the third post in this series](#) (<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/11/08/what-is-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-in-kids/>)



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disorder-in-kids/), she defined trauma as “the the scary, painful and yucky stuff that happens.”

Consider the trauma from a child’s perspective. While some items on the list are “scary, painful, and yucky” for children and adults alike, others would create barely a blip on an adult’s radar screen. But for kids who are small in stature, who often have little control over their environment, and who have fewer ways to escape trauma than adults, they can be “scary, painful, and yucky.”

1. Medical Intervention:

This includes, surgeries, tests, and procedures. Though such interventions are for a child’s future good, from their perspective the event is scary. It hurts. The environment is unfamiliar.

As an adult, our son gave this description of being wheeled into surgery when he was four. “I was laying on a hard gurney. They opened these big doors and wheeled me into this huge, cold, white room with glaring lights. I went a little crazy, so people kept leaning over and saying, ‘It’s okay. You’re all right.’ All I could think was, ‘They don’t have faces. None of the people have faces.’ It was years before I realized they were wearing masks that covered their mouths and noses.”

2. Abuse:

Any kind of abuse, whether physical, sexual, or emotional, as well as *any behavior perceived as abuse by a child*, can be traumatic. This includes bullying by adults or a child’s peers.

3. Neglect:

Think about the horrendous stories of children kept in boxes, or rows and rows of babies confined to cribs in foreign orphanages. We now know that many of these children develop radical attachment disorder (RAD). But neglect at a very early age is also a cause of trauma.

4. Disasters:

Name your disaster—tornado, hurricane, earthquake, tsunamis, flood, volcano, a house fire, a bridge collapse—any natural event where a child feels he or the adults around them are helpless can be a source of trauma.

5. Violent Acts:

The Sandy Hook school shooting is one example of a violent act. Others include war, gang violence, witnessing a parent being abused, or children who are kidnapped.

6. Accidents:

Car, plane or train accidents are a cause of trauma for children who experience the event. Even a playground accident or accidents in the home or on a farm can cause trauma.

7. Divorce:

The break up of a marriage (or a long-term relationship between unmarried partners) is often much more traumatic than adults may realize. The greater the animosity between the parents and the less parents address the issue directly with children, the more likely it is to cause trauma.

8. The Death of a Significant Loved One:



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(http://www.friendshipcircle.org/b_activity-guide/).

Whenever someone important to child's security dies, the event can cause trauma.

9. Moving:

Remember to look at moving from a child's perspective. A child usually has no control over the move. Friends are gone. The familiar environment is gone. Parents are preoccupied. New school. New neighborhood. Having to make new friends. That can be pretty traumatic.

10. Adoption:

Yes, even this wonderful, loving act can be traumatic for kids. Adoption is a big change for a child. Even for newborns, the mothers' voices and body rhythms that were synced for nine months are no longer there. For older children, their whole life changes. For the most part they have no control over what's happening.

Trauma Doesn't = PTSD

Before you throw your hands up in despair, remember that trauma and PTSD are not the same thing. Only when symptoms of trauma remain more than three months after the initial event is it classified as PTSD. And if a child is diagnosed with PTSD, it can be treated easily and effectively. So breathe easy until the next post in this series, which identifies symptoms of PTSD in kids.



WRITTEN ON JANUARY 8, 2013 BY:

Jolene

(<https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/author/jolene>)

Jolene Philo's first child, Allen, was born with a life-threatening birth defect that required 7 surgeries from birth to age five. She taught students with special needs in a variety of settings during her 25 years in education. Her book, *Different Dream Parenting* (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1572934670/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=friecircspecn-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1572934670): *A Practical Guide to Raising a Child with Special Needs* was released by DHP in November of 2011. She also blogs about special needs at [www.DifferentDream.com](http://DifferentDream.com) (<http://DifferentDream.com>).

[View all 12 of Jolene's posts \(https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/author/jolene/\)](https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/author/jolene/).

10 Comments Friendship Circle Special Needs Resource Blog

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Miche • 3 years ago

There is another category of cause of PTSD in children. Having a parent with Asperger's Syndrome, Autism or Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Not the same thing, but the results on children are the same. It's an ongoing stress for the child until they grow up and can leave the home, then it becomes PTSD. It's a separate category because it is not caused by abuse. The AS parent is unable to meet the emotional needs of the child and unable to display empathy. This has the effect the same as an emotionally abusive parent or an emotionally absent parent - but I want to stress it is not abuse. Abuse is deliberate and with the knowing of the abuser. Parents with AS genuinely love their children, but because of how their brain is wired differently, they are unable to meet these needs.

1 ^ ▾ • Reply • Share ▾



Ettina → Miche • 2 years ago



Asperger Syndrome and Autism are nothing like Narcissistic Personality Disorder. AS and autism don't affect emotional empathy, in fact many autistic people feel too much empathy. It can cause communication problems, but having an autistic parent as a non-autistic person is no worse than having a non-autistic parent as an autistic person.

However, because of bullying and lack of understanding when they were children, many autistic adults suffer from depression, personality disorders or other trauma-related issues, and those can definitely affect their parenting.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Angela Sheridan → Ettina • 2 years ago

Actually your statement is incorrect. My son who is 20 now has Asperger's syndrome and so does 2 of his first cousins. All three of the lack empathy. The reason is because it's hard for people with autism to recognize other people's feelings. I learned all this at the UCF center for autism. I thought my son was heartless until I was educated. So children with autistic parents can be very traumatizing.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



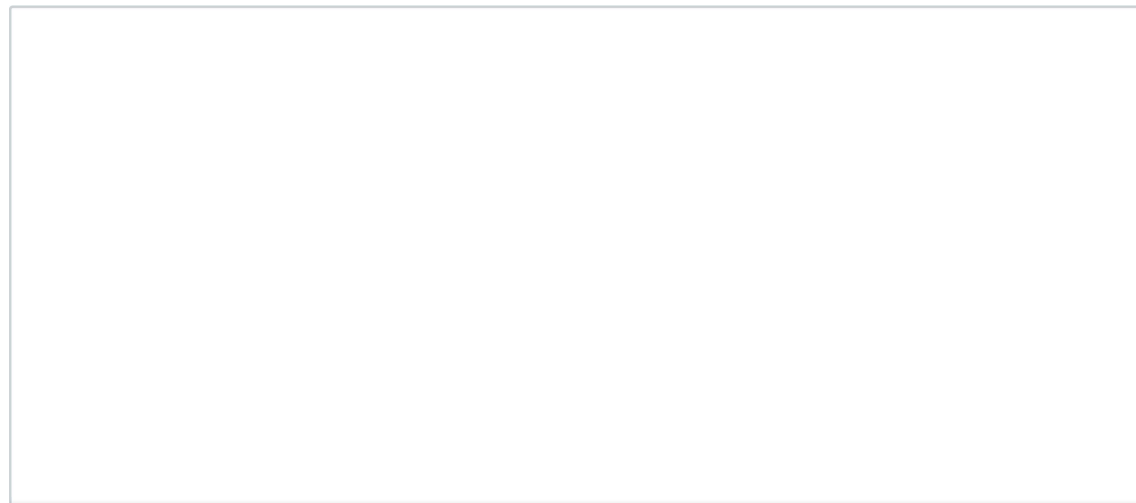
Welder → Angela Sheridan • 2 years ago

As a person with AS I have to concur that a lot of kids with AS come out the way they do because of neglectful perfectionist parenting, take me for instance, growing up I was the middle child, I had two sisters who always ganged up on me. Every time I found a fault with them, I was punished for it, whether or not it came to them taking up my TV time to the point where it came to the fact that I was spanked for it. I then got into Death and Black Metal, followed by European Metal mainly mixed with American Thrash Metal and why, I felt like I could relate to the artists who suffered abuse, isolation, being forced to stay where you're at. All in all, I was punished for taking offense to other people's actions against me, I simply was the scapegoat growing up, it didn't matter what happened. Every time I asked for help, it came with a price to a point where if someone else was punished, I was too for "defending myself wrongly" and the other kid was punished but supported at the same time. Even when it came to communication in between me and my parents, something was always wrong with the way I communicated with them. I was emotionally detached from them, fearful of them, and everyone else in school, I just started to isolate myself to the point where I could no longer take the World's crap until I tried to search for that inner child. So yah, communication skills are worthless for someone with Asperger's Syndrome, that's like saying to the hammer "put the nail in!" When the hammer already knows how to put the nail in, it just does it in a way that makes sense to the hammer.

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Angela Sheridan → Welder • 2 years ago



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Angela Sheridan → Welder • 2 years ago

There, I posted a statement from a researcher about your claim. There's 100s more if you want to look yourself. AS does not come from parenting lol it's a disorder that starts at practically birth. It's diagnosed at a very young age if caught early. My child was diagnosed at 4 and my nephews were diagnosed ASD even earlier. They all have an extra growth on chromosome 15 which has been known to be related to Autism but studies aren't sure yet, No one can cause Autism in a child. And the stuff you said you went through with the music and things like that are just you looking for an escape from abuse. Autistic children actually live productive lives and the ones on the Aspergers part of the spectrum have very high IQs like my child succeed in very smart careers. Of course a child on the spectrum could have been abused but their ASD was not caused from abuse. Not possible

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Sue → Angela Sheridan • a year ago

No one said Autism was caused by parenting. They said that children experience trauma from a lack of empathy which autistic parents would be lacking.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Denise • 2 months ago

I'd love to be able to sit with you for a few hours! My mom was married numerous times. I had 4 dads by the time I was 10 years old none of which wanted any part of us afterward. Daily fighting, throwing things, being ignored by mother, no food, food stamps, welfare, physical abuse, mental abuse was part of our daily lives. We lived in 15 houses by the time I was 18. She married two more times which were also unsuccessful marriages. I

am twin and have an older sister and we all hated each other. Older sister was a troublemaker which did drugs and failed out of highschool. She had one child and a failed marriage and she ended up being gay. I was always picked on by my older sister because I was physically stronger than my twin so when she would squish me I would fight back then be attacked by both. My twin was much larger than me and she and I shared a room until we were 14. I always got beat up by those two. I also had moderate dyslexia which wasn't found until 11th grade so I always felt stupid and was bullied and beat up in high school by the older kids. I was skin and bones and low self esteem so I was an easy target. I worked nearly full time from 12 years old - I got a job bought my own car, bed and paid for college myself. College ended abruptly after a few months because my mom said "you have 30 days to find a place to live - I'm getting married" to husband number 5! I always paid my own bills and was paying my mom rent. I was devastated because I wanted better than what I had lived with and an education was my way out I thought. My grandparents were millionaires and never helped us. They told my mom to give us up for adoption because twins will adopt faster. They could have helped but they disliked my mother and therefore disliked us. I decided 5 years ago to cut off my toxic family and honestly I have felt better since. For just over a year now I am having a lot of anxiety and severe insomnia so I sought help. I am 52 and just diagnosed with PTSD yesterday. Do you have any good books that cover children from highly abusive, toxic, scary, fighting, sexual misconduct etc causes PTSD which may help me recover?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Belinda • a year ago

I have been divorced since April 2017. I have 2 girls ages of 8 and 7. I am having a problem and seeing a pattern formed every after 2nd weekend's visit at their dad after returning they are uncontrolled for atleast 5 hours. I also see that they do not settle for atleast 4 days. It seems as if there is a habit of behaviour formed. Their behaviour is a pattern of mishaviour of not listening nor adhere to my house rules of sleeping at 7:30 for school. I am the prime care taker their mother. I am seeking as much help to assist me with them as I feel that they are not coping with the visiting to the father. Now correct me if I am wrong but I feel that there might be something wrong as they are not happy to see him for a long period of time. Please help me with some advise here.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Jodi → Belinda • a year ago

Do they eve fight you when it comes time to go there or do they act out few days before they have to go ??

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

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3 comments • a year ago

Lil Dill Jones — I very much need that hug. He has such a HORRIBLE start to Middle School! It is like he turns into a split personality that gets super mean and yes, vile at times. But not home?? I don't get it. I have

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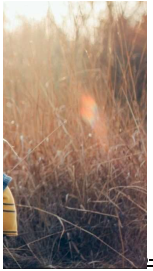
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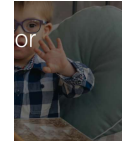
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