

Why Trauma Informed Police Response Matters: A Critical Moment to Support Children Exposed to Trauma

Police are often the first to arrive when violence occurs, placing them in a unique position at a critical moment in a child's life. For many children and families, interactions with law enforcement, especially during moments of crisis, can be frightening, harmful, or retraumatizing. When responses are trauma-informed and supported by strong partnerships with social service agencies, these encounters can shift from sources of fear to opportunities for safety. Thoughtful collaboration offers a pathway to reduce harm, increase stability, and improve outcomes for children and families.

The Impact of Exposure to Childhood Trauma

- Children exposed to trauma or violence are more likely to experience mental health disorders and behavioral challenges
- Exposure to trauma puts children at risk of involvement with juvenile and criminal justice system, and repeated victimization
- Childhood trauma exposure increases adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)



Why Early Identification of Trauma and Response is Important

- Identifying children exposed to violence (CEV) early and supporting recovery can reduce negative outcomes
- The immediate on-scene response by police allows early identification of CEV and initiation of recovery
- Early identification and appropriate response to traumatic experiences can help prevent the harmful effects of ACEs in the future



Law Enforcement as Protective Factors for Children

- Law enforcement can be a key protective factor for children by fostering resilience, reducing the impact of trauma, and promoting healthy development in children and families
- Officers are uniquely positioned to recognize children at risk and use trauma-informed practices to initiate recovery
- Officers can help build safety, security, and stability at the scene



Why Collaboration with Social Service Agencies Matter

- Collaboration between social service agencies and police creates opportunities to engage children and families at critical moments
- Finding opportunities for collaboration, training, and support leads to better outcomes for all
- NCTSN offers valuable resources for understanding child trauma
- Trained social services agencies can provide on-scene crisis stabilization assistance, emotional support, connection to basic needs assistance, and safety planning



Training Opportunities & Learning Collaborations

- Law enforcement is receptive to learning how to respond to CEV and support parents
- Police academies could benefit from teachings on child trauma
- Ongoing training opportunities enable police departments to expand their knowledge of available community resources while strengthening collaborative partnerships with local service agencies



Police-Child Interactions & Community Trust

- Children can perceive police as frightening, especially if their family or community has had a prior negative encounter
- A positive police interaction can lay the groundwork for trusting relationships between law enforcement and children
- Every point of contact between police and community members is an opportunity to strengthen community police relations

