

Brain Injury and Child Abuse

“At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States. This is likely an underestimate because many cases are unreported.” CDC.gov

30-60%

30-60% of perpetrators of Domestic Violence also abuse children in the household.

One Third

“Abusive Head Trauma (AHT) is a leading cause of physical child abuse deaths in children under 5 in the United States. AHT accounts for about one-third of all child maltreatment deaths.” CDC

Consider that the parent/caregiver of a child involved with the Child Welfare System may have had a brain injury. The ideas below should be applied to both children and parents/caregivers.

BEST PRACTICE

The Child Welfare System should:

- SCREEN for prior history of Brain Injury in caregivers and child
- ASSESS Cognitive & Functional Impairment
- EDUCATE staff on Brain Injury
- EDUCATE the family about Brain Injury
- PROVIDE and TEACH Accommodations
- CONNECT person served with Community Resources

COMMON PROBLEMS

After Brain Injury, we often see problems with:

- Attention, memory and new learning
- Slowed speed of processing
- Organization, problem solving & impulsivity
- Irritability, frustration & agitation
- Balance, dizziness & headaches
- Poor awareness of deficits & difficulties
- Difficulty being flexible, poor self-monitoring

What to Look For

Child Welfare personnel may see:

- Looking uninterested because they cannot pay attention
- Appearance of defiance because they cannot remember the rules
- Slow to follow directions because they cannot process quickly
- Getting into fights because of irritability, anger and impulsivity
- Falling into things, often getting hurt
- Missing appointments because of memory changes
- Gets stuck on an idea or a way of doing something, does not recognize mistakes

There are 4 types of child abuse: physical, sexual, psychological and neglect. Shaken Baby Syndrome is a type of Abusive Head Trauma (a form of physical abuse) that involves shaking.

Common Accommodations for Brain Injury Challenges

Here are some common and simple accommodations:

- Working for shorter periods of time
- Getting rid of distractions around you, like noise or movement
- Taking notes (on paper, in a notebook, on a phone or computer)
- Using a phone to set timers to remember appointments
- Repeating information to the person
- Slowing down when talking; giving them more time to respond
- Giving students extra time on tests
- Sitting in the front of the classroom to reduce distractions
- Coaching the person with the injury to “Stop, think and plan” then act
- Coaching the person to take deep breaths when feeling angry or anxious

Tools for Best Practice

Brain Links’ Strategies & Accommodations Tool: <https://www.tndisability.org/rehabilitation>

Symptom Questionnaire: <https://mindsourcecolorado.org/adult-symptom-questionnaire/>

Cognitive Strategies Guidebook: <https://mindsourcecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Strategies-and-Accommodations-Guidebook-CJ-Professionals-5.6.19.pdf>

Brain Injury Screening Resources:

OSU TBI Identification Method: <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/neuroscience-research-institute/research-centers/ohio-valley-center-for-brain-injury-prevention-and-rehabilitation/osu-tbi-id>

NASHIA's OBISSS: <https://www.nashia.org/obisssprogram>

Tennessee Resources

Brain Links' Website with many resources: <https://www.tndisability.org/brain>

Brain Links' Toolkits (for Service Professionals and Survivors):

<https://www.tndisability.org/brain-toolkits>

TN Department of Health TBI Program:

<https://tinyurl.com/3v5jrdt3>

Tennessee Brighter Futures' Resource Pages & Training for Brain Injury:

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-brain-injury>

Resource Pages & Training for Child Abuse:

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-child-abuse>

Tennessee Brighter Futures is organized and facilitated by Brain Links through a contract from the Tennessee Department of Health TBI Program

References:

Fast Facts: Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>

The Period of PURPLE Crying, National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome,

<https://dontshake.org/purple-crying>

Brain Injury and Child Welfare Best Practice Guide: Information and Tools for State Agencies.

Administration for Community Living Traumatic Brain Injury State Partnership Grant, Ad Hoc Workgroup on Child Welfare, Feb 2023. <https://www.nashia.org/acl-child-welfare>

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