

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 Injury Screening Resources:

NASHIA's OBISSS: <https://www.nashia.org/obisssprogram> - The OBISSS is highly recommended. It is made up of the OSU screening tool, a Symptoms Questionnaire and Strategies. It can be used electronically, on a computer, phone or ipad. It can be self-administered.

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>

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

Symptom Questionnaire and Cognitive Strategies:

Adult: bit.ly/3FLkzOV

Juvenile: bit.ly/4iS2bSC

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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