

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT ON ADULTS' WELL-BEING

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Child abuse and/or neglect is the result of an adult, a parent, or a caregiver causing the child emotional or physical harm.

The five main subtypes of child abuse are

- ❖ physical abuse
- ❖ emotional maltreatment
- ❖ neglect
- ❖ sexual abuse
- ❖ witnessing family violence

(Child Family Community Australia, 2014)

❖ Child abuse is prevalent in the United States, as 1 in 7 children experienced some form of abuse in 2020.

❖ The American Psychological Association (2022) states that children who suffer from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can have long-term effects of cognitive, behavioral, neurological deficiencies.

❖ After the traumatic event(s) of child abuse, children may experience changes in behavior, even after being removed from the perpetrator(s) and environment(s) of abuse. Changes in behavior can manifest aggressive tendencies, emotional instability, and depression.

(da Silva, 2018).

Neurological research has shown that when a child experiences abuse, changes in biological responses (e.g., smell, sound, other sensory input) occur as a consequence of stressful stimuli.

Post-abuse acute and chronic symptoms can include:

- ❖ sleep disruptions;
- ❖ anxiety; and
- ❖ and oppositional/violent behaviors.

In addition, there can be harmful socialization consequences, such as social withdrawal, restricted range of affect, and constriction of play.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017)

Currently, there are somewhat effective preventative post-abuse therapies for children.

Examples include:

- ❖ trauma-focused art therapy;
- ❖ cognitive behavioral therapy; and
- ❖ play therapy.

(Pifalo, 2011)

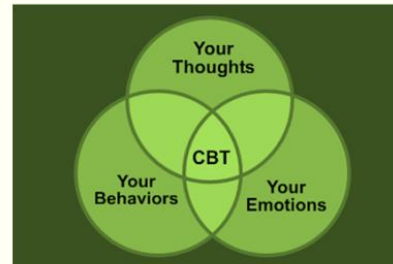


Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

❖ CBT is an evidence-based method of treating mental illnesses, such as depression. It is short-term and has the most effectiveness with behavioral treatment.

❖ It helps the individual to connect the adverse childhood experience with their thoughts and feelings, and then the behavior that follows.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017)



Play Therapy

- ❖ Play therapy is a form of therapy geared towards children.
- ❖ The child is observed while expressing their emotions through play, such as playing with dolls.
- ❖ Peaceful play is encouraged by a therapist, and children often explore their traumatic experiences through this form of therapy.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017)



Trauma-Focused Art Therapy

- ❖ Art therapy is an alternative for children and adults who are nonverbal and do not respond to evidence-based treatments.
- ❖ It is beneficial because it allows for the individual to visualize and express the traumatic experience(s).

(Lyshak-Stelzer et al., 2007)



Conclusion

❖ While it is crucial to study emotion processing in adolescence due to it being a period of time of reorganization of cognitive, affective, social functions, and maturation, it is also important to study how abuse in childhood and adolescence can affect individuals into adulthood and if/how early intervention has an impact on these outcomes.

❖ More research is needed to assess the effectiveness of early intervention therapy in preventing these long-term effects of child abuse impacting the health and wellness of adult survivors.

❖ In conclusion, human services case managers, therapists, and other professionals would benefit from long-term studies and practical applications that use prevention and intervention approaches to better understand and address the relationship between the adverse childhood experience of abuse and its long-term effects.