

## DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA

### What is the skill?

Healthy development occurs when children repeatedly experience safety, responsive caregiving, opportunities for learning, and support in managing emotions. These experiences allow many developmental systems to grow together.

### What does normal development look like?

Children gradually develop emotional regulation, attention, language, social skills, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities through everyday interactions with responsive caregivers. Development builds one skill upon another over time.

### How does neglect interfere?

Developmental trauma occurs when chronic neglect, abuse, or disrupted caregiving repeatedly interfere with development during the years when the brain and body are rapidly growing. Instead of affecting only one area, developmental trauma influences many developmental systems simultaneously, including emotional regulation, learning, relationships, physical health, sensory processing, and self-concept. This is why children often present with challenges across multiple areas of functioning rather than a single diagnosis.

### What might this look like?

Children may struggle with attention, learning, emotional regulation, behavior, friendships, sensory sensitivities, self-esteem, sleep, or physical health. Their strengths and difficulties may vary from day to day depending on how safe and regulated they feel.

### Parenting implications

Children affected by developmental trauma benefit from relationship-based care that emphasizes safety, predictability, co-regulation, and realistic developmental expectations. Progress is often gradual because the goal is supporting development, not simply reducing symptoms.

### From Understanding to Attunement

Developmental trauma is best understood as the cumulative effect of chronic adversity on a child's developing brain, body, and relationships. Healing occurs through repeated experiences of safety, connection, and responsive caregiving.

