



A Caregiver's Guide to Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)

What is trauma?

Trauma is an event or circumstance that is perceived as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening. It can have lasting adverse effects on the individual's well-being.

It is important to recognize that children and adults may perceive trauma differently. An event may be perceived as potentially traumatic by a caregiver but not be significantly distressing to the child, or vice versa.

What is traumatic grief?

Traumatic grief is an intense grief response that some individuals develop after a special person dies. In traumatic grief, the child perceives the circumstances of the death as being horrifying or terrifying. A child with traumatic grief may experience intrusive or repetitive thoughts about how the person died. Some common symptoms of traumatic grief include:

- Avoiding reminders of the special person or making frequent references to the death.
- Appearing unusually irritable or angry or having rapid mood changes.
- Having stomachaches or headaches.
- Having unusual fears or worries about safety.
- Difficulty sleeping or reluctance to sleep alone.

A child who is experiencing trauma reactions to the death of a special person will have difficulty in coping with life changes related to the death. He or she will be unable to enjoy positive memories about that person.

What is TF-CBT?

TF-CBT is a therapeutic intervention designed to help children and their parents or caregivers overcome the impact of traumatic events. The focus of TF-CBT treatment is to help the child learn coping strategies for traumatic stress reactions, and to reduce the symptoms of trauma. TF-CBT is provided to children and adolescents from ages 4 to 18. The TF-CBT treatment will last between 16 and 20 sessions, including:

- Individual sessions for the child.
- Individual session for the caregiver focusing on the needs of the child and how the caregiver can best support the child's therapeutic goals.
- Joint sessions between the caregiver and child.

What can my child/adolescent expect from TF-CBT?

One aim of TF-CBT is to provide the child an opportunity to discuss details about the trauma in a supportive and nurturing environment. The child will develop a trauma narrative, learn to identify and manage feelings, learn how to tolerate trauma reminders and learn how to replace negative thoughts with more helpful thoughts. In time the trauma reminders will have less impact on the child, allowing the child to return to a normative grieving process and enjoy positive memories of the person who died.

What do I have to do as a parent/caregiver?

Studies show that children whose parents or caregivers actively participate in TF-CBT treatment tend to improve more rapidly. TF-CBT helps caregivers by providing:

- Opportunities to discuss their own feelings and thoughts about their child's traumatic experience.
- Techniques to improve parenting skills.
- Ways to improve communication in family sessions.
- Preparation for parents to support their child during the sharing of the trauma narrative in a joint session.

Individual TF-CBT sessions with parents or caregivers are focused on the needs and experiences of the child. Parents or caregivers who need additional support for talking about their own trauma responses are encouraged to seek individual counseling outside of the TF-CBT treatment process.



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