

# Impact of Stress and Trauma on Children

## Handout 2A: Impact of Stress and Trauma on Children

There is strong evidence that a child who has experienced the incarceration of a parent is at a higher risk to experience extreme stress that may have lasting implications for that child's emotional health and well-being. This level of stress continues during the period of parental incarceration and is compounded by:

-  **The disruption in caregiving relationships**
-  **Economic and residential**
-  **Social stigma and pressure to keep the parental incarceration "secret"**

### Stress and Trauma May Present in Children and Youth in These Ways:

- Flashbacks of event interrupt daily activity
- Play-acting the event or repeating behavior that reminds them of trauma
- Incorporating the trauma into story-telling
- Physical symptoms, headaches/stomach aches
- Showing sudden/ extreme emotional reactions
- Worry about dying at an early age
- Sleep problems and nightmares
- Exaggerated startle response and panic
- Deliberate avoidance of reminders of trauma
- Irritability and anger
- Immature or regressed behavior; acting younger than their age
- Hyper vigilance; showing increased alertness
- Lack of interest in activities
- Problems concentrating

**Ben** is a 10-year-old boy who lately has been having temper tantrums when he does not get his way. For example, he becomes very upset if he loses a game. He will typically throw the game on the floor and stomp out of the room. His grandmother told you that this started after Ben saw his father arrested 3 years ago and has been getting worse. She said that Ben has recently started to act out in other ways, too, like picking on his sister for no reason and sassing back when she reminds him of chores he has to do.

| What problems are identified? | What might be going on? | What can you do? |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
|                               |                         |                  |

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**Jon** is a 13 year old boy who is falling in his coursework in school. He has been held back twice and is currently in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He has very few friends and seems very fearful that he will be punished for his failures. He has frequent anxiety attacks and seems unable to focus on the tasks in front of him. He's expressed that he'll probably end up in jail like his step-father.

**What problems are identified?**

**What might be going on?**

**What can you do?**

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## Handout 2B: Mentor Assessment

Based on the information covered today, please circle the answer that best reflects what you learned.

1. **Children and youth with an incarcerated parent always act out in the same ways.** True or False?
2. **What are 3 things that youth with an incarcerated parent are commonly stressed about?**
  - a. The disruption in caregiving relationships
  - b. Having to get a job and go to school
  - c. Finding a way to visit their parent in jail
  - d. Economic and residential instability
  - e. Social stigma and pressure to keep the parental incarceration “secret”
3. **Children who don’t express signs of stress aren’t depressed?** True or False?
4. **Mentors who are concerned about the possibility of their mentee’s depression should first talk with match support.** True or false?
5. **What is the relationship between the stress-induced behaviors and the typical behaviors by age?**
  - a. Youth under extreme stress always regress
  - b. Youth may have problems later if their stress isn’t managed while they are experiencing it or soon afterward and may not develop in typical way.
  - c. Youth who are experiencing trauma will relieve it over and over and will not develop normally.
6. **Mentors are mandated to report to their match support if they see or suspect violence in their mentee’s life.** True or false?

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## Handout 2B: Mentor Assessment (Answer Key)

1. **Children and youth with an incarcerated parent always act out in the same ways.** True or false?
2. **What are 3 things that youth with an incarcerated parent are commonly stressed about?**
  - a. The disruption in caregiving relationships
  - b. Having to get a job and go to school
  - c. Finding a way to visit their parent in jail
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3. **Children who don’t express signs of stress aren’t depressed?** True or False?
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  - b. Youth may have problems later if their stress isn’t managed while they are experiencing it or soon afterward and may not develop in typical way.
  - c. Youth who are experiencing trauma will relieve it over and over and will not develop normally.
6. **Mentors are mandated to report to their match support if they see or suspect violence in their mentee’s life.** True or false?