

Memorandum

TO: ALL DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL

FROM: Anthony Mata
Chief of Police

**SUBJECT: RECOGNIZING TRAUMA IN
CHILDREN**

DATE: February 28, 2022

APPROVED

Memo# 2021-003

BACKGROUND

As part of the Gender-Based Violence Response and Strategy Workplan the City Council directed the Police Department, through the City Manager's Office, to "expand trauma informed care training to reflect patterns of stress and trauma for children and incorporate survivor-centered strategies." This workplan was developed in coordination between the Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee, the Santa Clara County Children, Seniors, and Families Committee, the Sexual Assault Investigations Unit, the Special Victims Unit, and the Family Violence Unit, among others.

In response to the directive, the Department developed a training video entitled *Recognizing Trauma in Children* ([link](#)). This 16-minute video explores the potential causes of childhood trauma, contributing factors, recognition, responses, and resources.

ANALYSIS

The National Institute of Mental Health website defines childhood trauma as, "The experience of an event by a child that is emotionally painful and distressful, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects." Children can be affected by a single traumatic event or several events caused by their internal or external environments. Internally, children and adolescents can be impacted physically and psychologically by witnessing intimate partner violence¹, having a parent or attachment figure with a mental illness, having a parent or attachment figure who is a substance abuser, or experiencing the loss or death of a parent or attachment figure. Children may suffer lasting effects of trauma by being emotionally abused, physically abused, sexually abused, or experiencing neglect. Externally, children may experience trauma due to bullying, community violence, war, terrorism, medical procedures, or natural disasters. These topics are not exhaustive.

Trauma affects each child and adolescent differently. Factors that may influence a child's response to a traumatic event can include the severity of the event, the child's past exposure to trauma, the child's

¹ The term "Intimate Partner Violence" describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm done to an individual by a current or former partner or spouse.

ALL DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL
SUBJECT: RECOGNIZING TRAUMA IN CHILDREN

February 28, 2022

Page 2

developmental stage and cognitive abilities, their attachment figure's reaction to the event, and the child's overall perception of support and protection from their family unit.

Experiencing a traumatic event can be very frightening for children and adolescents. These experiences can evoke strong emotions and physical reactions that can last long after the event. Children and adolescents may experience physiological reactions during the traumatic event or long after the event, due to the fight, flight, or freeze response.

Additionally, children and youth may experience intrusive thoughts and memories of the event. These thoughts and memories may be temporary or prompted by reminders such as returning to the location of a traumatic event, being in proximity to the individual who inflicted the abuse or trauma, a familiar sound or smell that brings up memories of the traumatic event, or being touched in a way that reminds them of the event.

Younger children may exhibit signs or symptoms of trauma such as bedwetting, changes to eating habits, inability to concentrate, regressive behavior, fear of separation from caregivers, excessive crying, aggressive behavior, inappropriate sexualized behavior, irritability, hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, complaints of stomach or body pain, or experiencing anxiety or depression. In addition, adolescents may exhibit signs of trauma by having a significant change in school performance, withdrawing socially, alcohol or drug use, sexual promiscuity, running away, having a negative self-image, engaging in self-harming behavior, or suicidal ideation.

The above descriptions are not exhaustive and should be used only as a guide to recognize that trauma may be experienced or manifest in many ways.

Additional resources may be found at:

- [American Psychological Association \(link\)](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health \(link\)](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(link\)](#)

To access the training video, go to the following link: <https://youtu.be/7nPXPxvgTNg>

ORDER

All Department sworn and Communications personnel shall view the training video *Recognizing Trauma in Children* ([link](#)) by **May 30, 2022 at 1700 hours**. All other professional staff are invited to view the video but are not required to do so. This training must be completed on-duty. No overtime is authorized for this training.



Anthony Mata
Chief of Police

AM:SD:GB