Trigger Warning: The information in this resource is potentially triggering.

The Effects of Trauma on Child & Adolescent Development

Child & Adolescent Development

All children have abilities and talents which develop at different stages. Typical development refers to familiar patterns of growth observed in children regarding their cognitions, feelings and behaviours. Some children develop according to less common growth patterns, which can be referred to as atypical (not typical) development[1].

Child development covers the period from conception to adolescence, a transition from dependence to independence. The developmental period after childhood is referred to as adolescence, which begins from puberty to early adulthood[2].

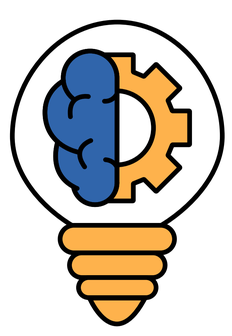
Definition: child and adolescent development refer to the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes a person experiences from infancy to adolescence[3]. Typical child development includes physical growth alongside intellectual, language, emotional, and social development. Each aspect influences others, supporting children to explore the world around them[4+5].

The Brain

Different brain regions and cognitive abilities develop at different stages and are influenced by culture and environment. In childhood, the brain can be described as expanding, followed by refining in adolescence, with the brain finally stabilising in adulthood[6].

Cognition

During childhood and adolescence, people gain the cognitive skills needed to think critically, reflect on their aims in life and their role in the world[7].



Physiology

An infant can learn to regulate their behaviour and physiology, supported by caregiver(s)[8]. A child's physiological development typically includes an increase in size, acquiring and refining complex motor skills. An increase in hormones in puberty marks the physical changes associated with adolescence.

Speech and Language

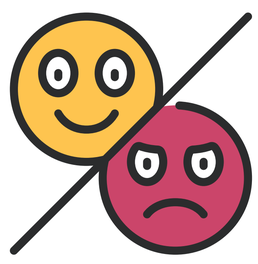
Children's language skills can develop at different rates. In the first year of life, a baby may recognise a voice and babble expressions. Single words can give way to phrases, sentences, conversations, reading and writing[9].

Social

Social development describes children's sense of self in relation to others. Infants are often responsive to the actions and words directed to them[10]. Interactions with others support children to develop their independence and navigate social norms[11].

Emotion

Emotional development refers to children's sense of self and temperament or individual personality. In infancy, the child-caregiver(s) interactions affect emotional development, and a nurturing relationship can influence children's capacities to regulate their emotions[12].



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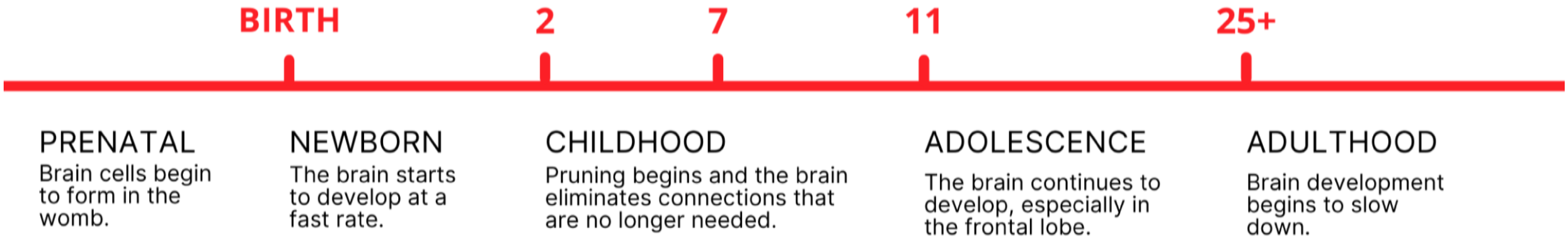
Trauma and Child & Adolescent Development



Individual Differences

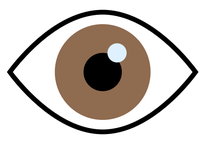
Every child is unique, and their differences, traits, physiological and psychological characteristics can affect how they experience adversity or trauma[13]. Neurodiversity is the concept that all people vary in terms of their neurocognitive abilities. The term neurominority refers to people who do not have a 'neurotypical' neurocognitive profile and who have neurodiverse/neurodivergent conditions, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette syndrome[14].

The Brain

The experience of traumatic stress can have long-lasting effects on some regions of the brain. The increase in stress hormones can impact memory, behaviour and mood, affecting how people interact with themselves and their environment[15].

Cognition

When children experience trauma, they may have problems thinking clearly, reasoning and remembering things. It may be difficult for them to plan, and they may find it hard to acquire new skills and take in new information[16].



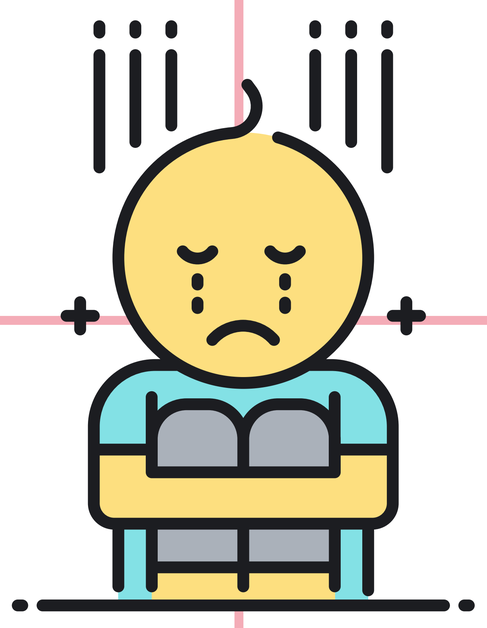
The perception and experience of adversity differ from one person to another. It is the perception of adversity and how it is internalised, which determines if someone experiences an event as traumatic [17].

Physiology

If children grow up afraid or under constant or extreme stress, the immune system and body's stress response systems can become hyper-responsive[18]. If excessive stress levels become normalised, it can disrupt organ systems development and increase the risk of stress-related illnesses[19].

Social

Children who have experienced trauma can respond in multiple ways. Some reenact the traumatic experience and express aggressive or self-destructive behaviour. Whilst others can withdraw, be oppositional, compliant or show less impulse control[21].



Speech and Language

A traumatic experience can impact a child's capacity to express themselves. In children, language development may be affected in terms of using or retaining a particular language; some children may choose not to communicate at all[20].

Emotion

Some people who have experienced trauma have difficulty regulating emotions such as anger, anxiety, sadness, and shame[22]. They may feel that many things trigger emotional responses that can translate into actions of violence and self-harm.

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