

TRAUMA SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

QRTP Infosheet: Issue Three

Exposure to [Adverse Child Experiences \(ACEs\)](#) is a pervasive problem. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. Nearly two-thirds of Ohioans have been exposed to ACEs. Ohioans of color and Ohioans with low incomes, disabilities and/or who are residents of urban and Appalachian counties are more likely to experience multiple ACEs.¹ As many as one in seven children in Ohio have experienced three or more ACEs.² The development of children and youth can be impeded when trauma and issues related to it are not addressed, resulting in poor health outcomes and disruption of school success.

Screening and assessment provide valuable information about each child or youth's interests, strengths, and needs. Screening gives a snapshot of whether the child or youth's development is on track. Assessment is an ongoing process that includes observation and provides information about development over time. Trauma-informed screening and assessment practices help providers identify children, youth and families' needs early in the process and to tailor services to meet those needs.

Trauma Screening refers to a tool or process that is a brief, focused inquiry to determine whether an individual has experienced one or more traumatic events, has reactions to such events, has specific mental or behavioral health needs, and/or needs a referral for a comprehensive trauma-informed mental health assessment. Screening is a "wide-net" process.

- Screening is often used universally, and it helps determine whether a child or youth needs a professional clinical, trauma-focused assessment.
- Trauma screening should measure a wide range of experiences and identify common reactions and symptoms of trauma (e.g., reliving an event over and over, lack of positive emotions, intense ongoing fear, ongoing sadness, nightmares, and sleep problems), as well as other commonly reported difficulties (e.g., behavior problems, depression, anxiety).
- Most screening tools are developed for use by professionals with a range of training and experience.

Trauma-Informed Assessment involves evaluating the ways in which a child or youth's functioning might have been affected by the experience of trauma and determines the need for appropriate trauma treatment or interventions.

- There are three dimensions of trauma on which such an assessment might focus: a) whether a child or youth has been exposed to potentially traumatizing events; b) whether a child or youth displays symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress; and c) whether a child or youth meets the criteria for a formal diagnosis.

¹ Health Policy Institute of Ohio. "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Health Impact of ACEs in Ohio," August 2020.

² 2016 National Survey of Children's Health

- An assessment will provide an agency with a fuller understanding of a child or youth's needs and behaviors; guide treatment plans and determine a trauma-focused intervention(s) that will help a child or youth to build resilience.
- Most assessment tools are developed for use by professionals with a clinical license or certification with specific training and experience.

Selecting a Tool

When selecting a screening and/or assessment tool, factors to consider include how well it meets the needs of the target population and fits within an agency's service delivery system. There are also properties specific to each tool that must be considered. As part of any selection process for a trauma-informed screening or assessment tool, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) recommends examining these specific properties:

- **Validity** – the degree to which the tool, including each of its specific items, accurately accomplishes its purpose, or whether the tool measures what it is intended to measure
- **Reliability**- the degree to which the tool is consistent across time and different raters
- **Standardization of Norms** – a process in instrument and measure development that allows for comparisons between data from the screening/assessment tool with general populations of the same age group

While there is a distinction between screening tools and functional assessments, there is often an overlap in the use of both. Some tools are used for both screening and assessment, while in other cases, assessment tools are adapted for screening purposes. Regardless of how these tools are used, screening and assessing for trauma should take place early, to guide treatment planning.

The NCTSN searchable database contains detailed reviews of measures utilized in the field of child traumatic stress, designed to allow comparison across measures. Users can access comprehensive clinical and research information to determine whether a measure is appropriate for a specific individual or group, while considering factors such as the purpose of the assessment, age, cultural and linguistic group, and trauma type. Tools reviewed include those that measure children's experiences of trauma, their reactions to it, and other mental health and trauma-related issues.

[Measure Reviews | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(nctsn.org\)](https://www.nctsn.org/measure-reviews)

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) measurement tools in child welfare consist of both screening tools and assessment tools. In order to help agencies evaluate tools, the research evidence for each tool was assessed and a rating is provided. A basic description of each tool, as well as access/purchase and contact information, is available through the links below. Please note that this list reflects the measurement tools that the CEBC has reviewed to date and is not a comprehensive list of measurement tools used in child welfare.

[CEBC » Assessment Tools \(cebc4cw.org\)](https://cebc4cw.org/assessment-tools)