

WHAT IS TF-CBT?



TF-CBT is an evidence-based treatment that helps children address the negative effects of trauma, including processing their traumatic memories, overcoming problematic thoughts and behaviors, and developing effective coping and interpersonal skills.

Benefits for Parents

It also includes a treatment component for parents or other caregivers who were not abusive. Parents can learn skills related to stress management, positive parenting, behavior management, and effective communication.

Target Population

Children and adolescents (ages 3–18) who remember being exposed to at least one trauma (e.g., child maltreatment, sexual and/or physical abuse, traumatic loss of a loved one) and who experience the following:

- PTSD symptoms
- Elevated levels of depression, anxiety, shame, or other dysfunctional abuse-related feelings, thoughts, or developing beliefs
- Trauma-related behavioral problems, including age inappropriate sexual behaviors
- Nonoffending parents or other caregivers

TF-CBT combines elements drawn from multiple approaches and theories:

- Cognitive therapy, which aims to change behavior by addressing a person's thoughts or perceptions, particularly those thinking patterns that create distorted or unhelpful views
- Behavioral therapy, which focuses on modifying habitual responses (e.g., anger, fear) to non-dangerous situations or stimuli
- Family therapy, which examines patterns of interactions among family members to identify and alleviate problems
- Attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of the parent-child relationship
- Developmental neurobiology, which provides insight on the developing brain during childhood



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Components of the TF-CBT protocol can be summarized by the word **“PRACTICE”**

P - Psychoeducation and parenting skills— Discussing and teaching about child abuse in general and the typical emotional and behavioral reactions to sexual abuse as well as skills training for parents in positive parenting, child behavior management strategies and effective communication

R - Relaxation techniques—Teaching relaxation methods, such as focused breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and visual imagery, which may benefit the parent as well

A - Affective expression and regulation—Helping the child and parent manage their emotional reactions to reminders of the abuse, improve their ability to identify and express emotions, and participate in self-soothing activities

C - Cognitive coping and processing—Helping the child and parent understand the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and exploring and correcting inaccurate and/or unhelpful attributions related to everyday event

T - Trauma narration and processing—Conducting gradual exposure exercises, including verbal, written, and/or other creative recounting of abusive events, and processing inaccurate and/or unhelpful thoughts about the abuse

I - In vivo exposure—Gradual exposure to trauma reminders in the child’s environment (e.g., darkness, the setting where the trauma occurred), so the child learns to control his or her own emotional reactions

C - Conjoint parent/child sessions—Family work to enhance communication and create opportunities for therapeutic discussion regarding the abuse and for the child to share his/her trauma narration

E - Enhancing personal safety and future growth— Education and training on personal safety skills, interpersonal relationships, and healthy sexuality and encouragement in the use of new skills in managing future stressors and trauma reminders