

Trauma and the Think-Feel-Do Connection

Traumatic experiences can impact how children see themselves, others, the world and even their future.

One way this can appear is through an increased sensitivity to potential danger. Children’s internal alarm systems may go on high alert, seeing threats to their safety where none may exist.

When our internal alarm system is triggered, our protective reflex kicks in. This is also called our *Fight-Flight-Freeze Response*. Stress hormones are released to prepare the body to protect itself. This response is helpful when real danger exists, but can cause problems when there is a false alarm.

Below is an example of how a child’s faulty alarm system can cause problems.

Trauma	A child was involved in a major tornado.	
Triggering Situation	The child sees the sky darkening, feels wind increasing and raindrops starting.	
Child’s Thought	“A tornado is coming – we’re in danger!”	
Child’ Feelings	Fear, confusion, the body’s stress response starts (e.g., heart rate increase, upset stomach, sweaty palms, etc.)	
Child’s Behavior	Crying, pleading with adult to find shelter, disorganized behavior	
Outcomes	+	Gets adult’s attention, may lead adult to seek safety, possibly protected if real danger exists
	-	Can’t calm down, becomes more reactive and argumentative, becomes physically distressed, gets negative attention and consequences