

# Let's consider some common myths and ideas about trauma.

## *Myth*

Trauma is just about the event of abuse or neglect.

## *Fact*

Trauma isn't just about what happened to you. It's about what happened inside of you as a result of what happened to you. How you think, feel, and interpret these experiences impacts your sense of perceived safety. This can leave your system constantly scanning for threats to protect and keep you safe.

## *Myth*

"It wasn't that bad, so they should be over it."

"It happened a long time ago and it's not unsafe anymore"

## *Fact*

The degree of trauma doesn't necessarily relate to the impact it has on a person. What is important to consider is the age and stage of when it happened (the earlier during critical development the more impactful and enduring), whether there were any protective factors like an empathic witness, the experience of being believed and supported when disclosing, connection and accessibility to safe supports etc.

## *Myth*

Complex trauma means that a person has PTSD.

## *Fact*

Complex trauma occurs when there have been repeated, prolonged, or chronic exposure to a traumatic event. It is about how the child adapts and how their development is impacted by the trauma. PTSD can happen by experiencing, witnessing, or listening to one traumatic life event. There are specific symptoms related to PTSD and isn't always experienced by someone who has been exposed to traumatic events. Everyone responds to events differently.

*"Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness."*

*— Peter Levine*

## WHAT YOU SEE



## WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING

They are having a "tantrum" because they didn't get what they wanted



The child lacks self-regulation skills and gets overwhelmed with big emotions they have not been taught or coached to cope with

The child is constantly fighting, causing disruption or having arguments



The child needs support and practice with managing frustration, tolerating emotions and conflict resolution

The child won't apologise or show remorse



The child hasn't experienced rupture and repair. Meaning they haven't had apologies modelled to them, or a way of "fixing" a problem

Children "act out" because they are distressed. They are expressing pain, hurt, discomfort and showing areas they need development and support to grow in. This is not because they are "bad" and need consequences.

By understanding their unmet needs curiously, we create an environment where we connect and repair repeated experiences of loss and relational disappointments.