

I'm Wondering...

What is Developmental trauma?

You might be wondering what “Developmental trauma” means and why adults use that word.

Developmental trauma is a name adults use when a child has experienced stress, fear, or not enough safety over a long time, especially when they were younger.

When children are still growing, their brains and bodies are learning about the world. If the world feels unsafe for a long time, the brain learns to stay on alert.

That can affect how a child:

- Feels
- Trusts
- Learns
- Reacts
- Connects with others

It is not a sign that a child is broken.

It is a sign that a child has had to survive.

Here's one way to think about it:

When a plant grows in steady sunlight and water, it grows one way. If it grows in storms or strong wind, it might grow differently — not wrong, just shaped by the weather. Developmental trauma is about how early experiences shape growth.

Some things developmental trauma can affect

It can affect:

- Feeling safe with adults
- Managing big emotions
- Concentrating at school
- Sleeping
- Trusting people
- Reacting quickly to stress

Different children are affected in different ways.



How some children might feel?

- Frustrating
- Confusing
- Overwhelming
- Embarrassing
- Exhausting
- Different at different times
- All of these feelings are allowed.

For adults supporting this child

- Avoid using “developmental trauma” as an identity label.
- Do not equate developmental differences with permanent damage.
- Focus on safety, predictability, and connection.

This is about context and hope, not diagnosis.

If you want to...

- If you want to understand how early experiences might affect you, you can ask.
- If you want help with big reactions or strong feelings, you can ask for support.
- If you don't want to talk about early life right now, that's okay.
- You don't have to explain your story before you feel ready.

One thing to remember:

Developmental trauma is about what happened around you, not something wrong inside you. Brains can grow, change, and heal. You are not broken.