

# Treating Trauma/Tratando el trauma

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November 28, 2018



## Treating Trauma

**By James McGuirk, Ph.D.**

At age seven, Edward, watched as his mother Alma (real names withheld for confidentiality) endured the pangs of an abusive relationship. Though she would later succeed in extricating them both, Edward's life was marked with trauma.

He lashed out at school, fought with his siblings at home, and his behavior at school worsened. Alma became overwhelmed and didn't know how to respond properly to calm him down.

Things began to change after Edward was enrolled in an Astor Services for Children and Families treatment facility in the Bronx. In the beginning, progress was slow.

Yet as Edward acclimated to his new environment and the site's program, his mother noticed that he became calmer and more agreeable with his siblings.



She also learned new skills from Astor's staff that taught her how to help her son manage his anger and fear.

Today, Edward is 13 and successfully integrated back into his neighborhood's public school. Alma reports that without Astor's support, she doesn't know if her family would have made it through that turbulent time. Now she, Edward and the rest of their family are looking forward to a promising future.

When left unattended, children coping with trauma and the associated stress can become troubled, as do their families and communities. The resulting emotional difficulties will impact learning and can lead to higher high school dropout rates.



Only 30 percent of children ages 14 and older with an emotional disturbance earn a standard high school diploma, according to the [New York State Council on Children Families](#).

The stigmas surrounding mental struggles can add to a child's sense of despondency, making him or her liable to engage in dangerous behaviors and even suicide. In addition, there is clear scientific data that links the number of traumatic events we experience during childhood to many areas of adult functioning, including health status and life expectancy.

In the Bronx, the toxic stress of poverty adds to the burden of trauma and contributes to the 22.3 percent of 16-to-24-year-olds that are neither in school nor working, a group that [Measure of America](#) refers to as "disconnected youth." If the current trajectory of their lives is unchanged, the long-term economic and social burdens on their communities could be significant.

Communities can help children cope with harrowing events and prosper as healthy, contributing members of society by coming together in funded and effective approaches through public, government and private partnerships that help identify, treat and connect with the children affected by



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trauma. Young children with emotional and behavioral challenges from a traumatic experience have been shown to benefit from early intervention programs, making it important to identify issues early on.

Public awareness campaigns that lead to a heightened awareness of the roots of childhood trauma and its disturbing effects are needed. So are continuing, open conversations about preventative measures and the mental and behavioral instability that often follows traumatic experiences and how to mitigate them. Accessible home-, school- and peer-based programs for troubled kids and their families are also vital, particularly services aimed at developing youth and teens.

Communities must commit to the treatment, health care and education of their vulnerable youth to show them how to become successful adults, especially when parents can't support or care for their children.

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