Childhood trauma or mental health disorder?

The traumatic effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and symptoms of mental health disorders can often look alike.

Institute for Child and Family Well-Being





Mental Health Diagnosis	Overlapping Symptoms	Childhood Trauma
Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder	Disorganized and/or agitated activity; difficulty sleeping, poor concentration, hypervigilant and impulsive behavior.	Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) • Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
Oppositional Defiant Disorder	Angry and irritable outbursts; argumentative with adults; refusal to comply with rules; reckless/spiteful/vindictive behavior.	 Separation from/ loss of parent Physical or emotional neglect
Anxiety Disorder (Social Anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder or phobia)	Feeling on-edge; sleep disturbance; intrusive thoughts; irritability; Avoidance of feared stimuli, repetitive behaviors.	 Witnessing violence Living with a parent with untreated mental health disorder(s) or who abuses substances
Major Depressive Disorder	Decreased energy levels and interest in activities; withdrawn; sleep disturbance.	 Mitigating Factors Nurturing, protective caregivers Early detection and intervention

What can you do? Provide screening for ACEs: https://uwm.edu/icfw/tools-and-resources

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