

## Phenomenology of Trauma in Preschool Children

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### Abstract

The present study is part of an ongoing longitudinal project examining the phenomenology of trauma in preschool children. Through multiple case studies the subjective experience of trauma in children ages 3-5 years old will be illuminated. The effects of trauma alter the developmental trajectory through four primary mechanisms. First, a child's sense of time, and especially a sense of a possible future without fear, is altered. Second, they lack meaningful involvement in their world. Primary means of being involved in the world include: acting, coping, caring, using and responding, each of which are more or less distorted, often coming out as the phrase: "I don't care." Third, their social world is altered, often by mis-attunement and a pervasive feeling of uncanniness. Such behavior comes out in many ways, for example challenges in the classroom with peers or in their ability to navigate the separation-individuation process. Finally, having had to come to grips with their own finitude before they have the cognitive capacity to create frameworks for understanding such experiences creates a severe crisis for the child. Children have an innate curiosity about death: the sparrow on the sidewalk and the mouse in the trap are approached with equal intensity. In most instances this is death as an object. When death becomes subjective the child has little capacity to cope. Numerous psychotherapeutic methods will be suggested as effective interventions in the clinical setting. Clinical case examples will be provided as demonstrations.

### Keywords

Trauma, preschool, phenomenology, psychotherapy.