

Caring for the Caregivers

Medically Complex Pediatric and Young Adult Conference

St. Mary's Hospital for Children

September 27, 2025



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Objectives for Today

Normalize

Normalize the need for families and providers to receive support around traumatic stress.

Clarify

Clarify what traumatic stress is and how it impacts families and providers.

Highlight

Highlight the pathways Alongside is creating to minimize and mitigate traumatic stress in pediatrics.



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Our Vision

A pediatric health system that minimizes and mitigates traumatic stress whenever possible for providers and patient families.



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My Story



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A Clearinghouse for Solutions

Filtered through a family-centered lens.



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What is Pediatric Medical Traumatic Stress?

A set of psychological and physiological responses of children and their families to pain, injury, medical procedures, and invasive or frightening treatment experiences.

—National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), 2003

[PDF\) When Treatment Becomes Trauma: Defining, Preventing, and Transforming Medical Trauma](https://www.therapist.com/resource/when-treatment-becomes-trauma-defining-preventing-and-transforming-medical-trauma)
[therapist.com | therapist.com](https://www.therapist.com)
<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma-/trauma-types/medical-trauma/effects>

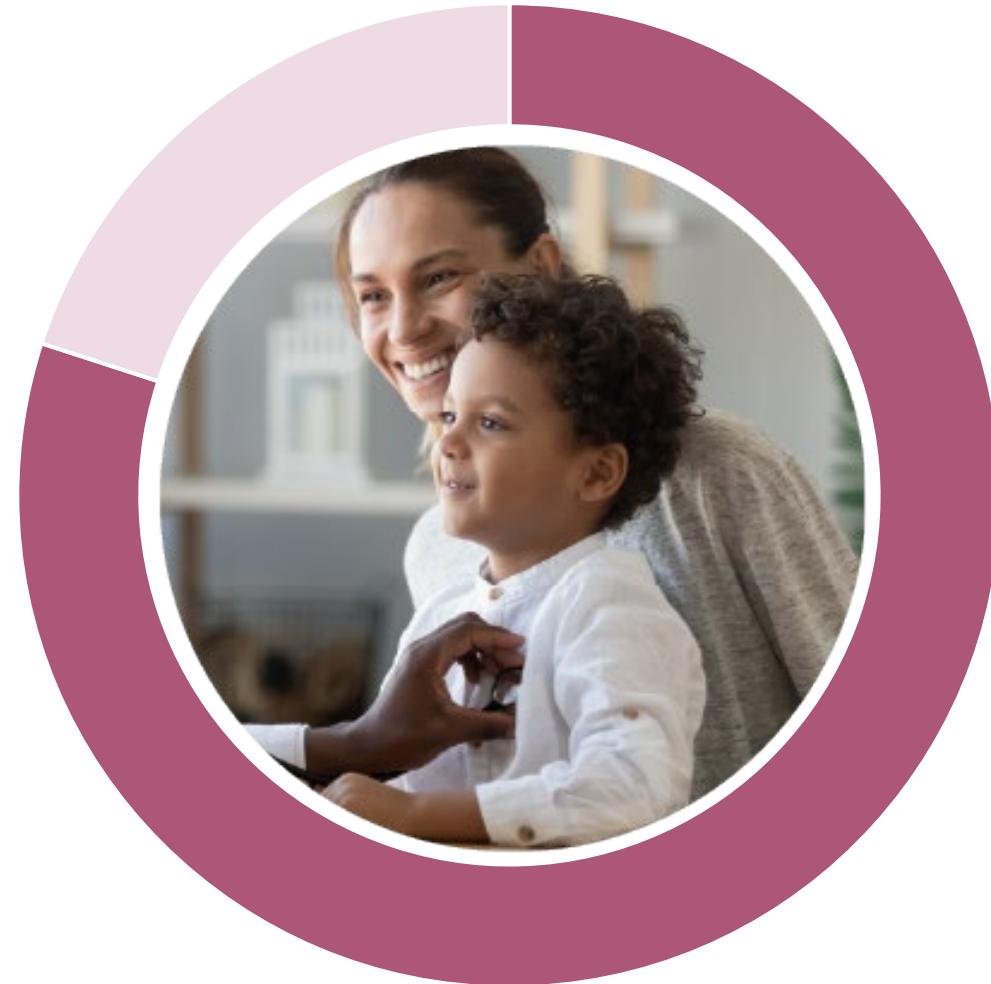


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Prevalence

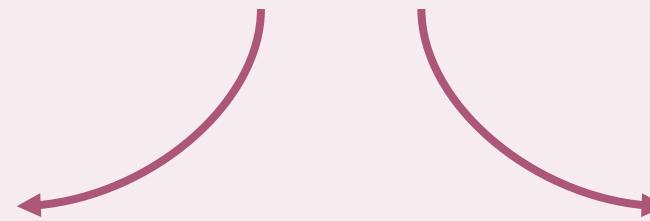
According to the NCTSN, up to **80%** of children and their families experience some traumatic stress reactions following a life-threatening illness, injury, or painful medical procedure.





Our Work

Families



Providers



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Our work with families



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Our Approach: Support & Engage Impacted Families



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Wellbeing Groups



Validate
experiences.



Build
community.



Increase
coping skills.



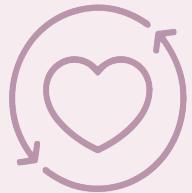
The group is like a big warm hug, where you don't have to explain everything – other people here already get it.

- Wellbeing Group Participant



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Support & Engage Caregivers



Build a pathway to meaning making through engagement.



Decrease barriers to entry.



Continue ongoing support through topic-based community sessions.



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Post Traumatic Growth

Can lead to:

- greater appreciation of life,
- improved interpersonal relationships,
- greater personal strength,
- recognition of new possibilities in one's life course, and
- spiritual or religious growth.



What Is Post-Traumatic Growth? (+ PTG Inventory & Scale)



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Frequently asked questions:

How do families find Alongside?

What about siblings and kids who were patients?



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Our work with providers



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Our Approach: Support & Engage Pediatric Providers



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Our Goal

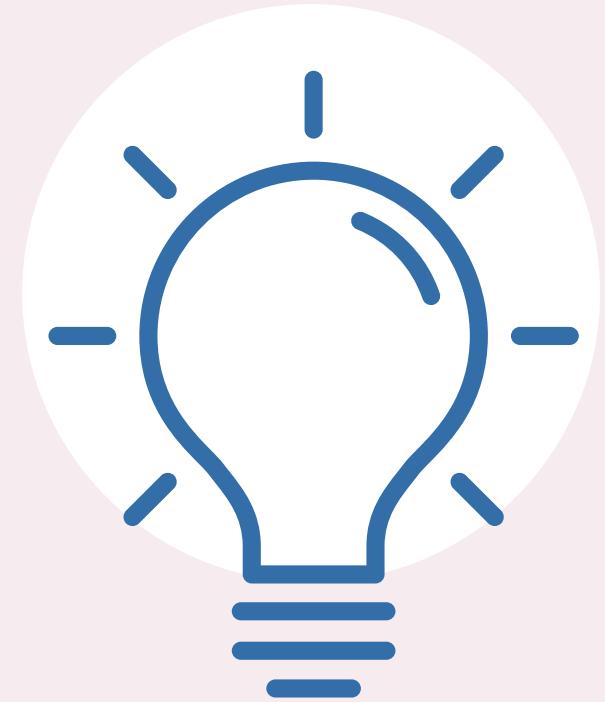


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STS: What is it?

Secondary Traumatic Stress is the—

- Emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.
- Responses based on exposure to the trauma of others (and participation in the trauma of others as a healthcare professional).





STS: Why it matters

Patient Impact:

- Improved patient care
- Reduced impact of medical care on patient and family emotional health

Provider Impact:

- Potential to reduce burn-out and leaving profession
- Increased job satisfaction
- Improved quality of life
- Reduced tension with families

Organizational Impact:

- Reduction in medical errors
- Reduction in malpractice claims

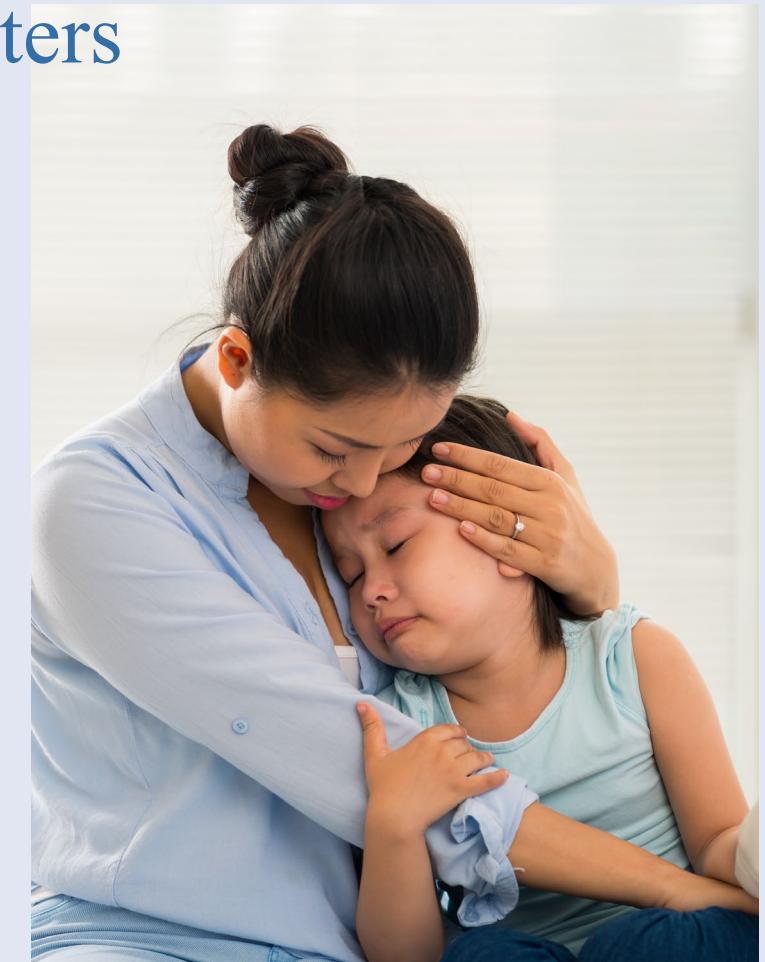




Pediatric Medical Traumatic Stress: Why it matters

Daily functioning and treatment adherence

- While most children and parents cope well, some will have persistent reactions that can:
 - Impair daily function
 - Affect treatment adherence-treatment avoidance
 - Impede optimal recovery



SAMHSA source: [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach \(2014\)](#)
NCTSN Healthcare providers comprehensive guide

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29800298/> Muscara F, McCarthy MC, Hearps SJC, Nicholson JM, Burke K, Dimovski A, Darling S, Rayner M, Anderson VA. Featured Article: Trajectories of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Parents of Children With a Serious Childhood Illness or Injury. *J Pediatr Psychol*. 2018 Nov 1;43(10):1072-1082. doi: 10.1093/jpepsy/jsy035. PMID: 29800298.



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SAMSHA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

SAMSHA has called for practitioners to use trauma-informed care approaches to address this public health issue.





What Alongside Also Advocates For

Simple, Integrated Mindfulness Practices

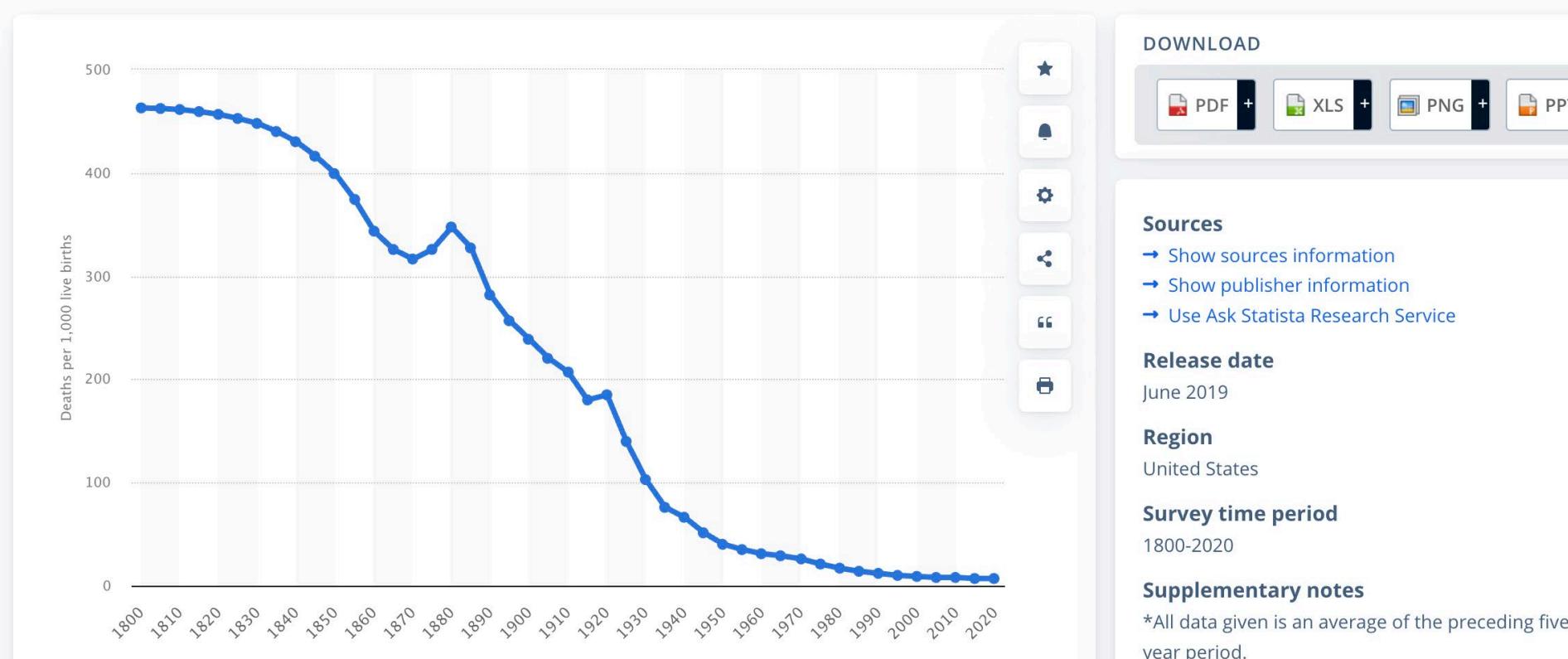


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Gap in Care: Historical Context

Child mortality rate (under five years old) in the United States, from 1800 to 2020*



<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1041693/united-states-all-time-child-mortality-rate/>



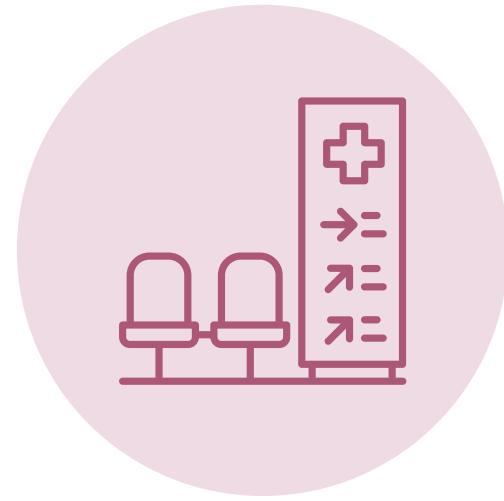
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Systemic Catch-Up



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Pediatric hospitals
prioritizing
patient experience
and staff wellbeing



Top-tier
researchers

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Thought Leadership



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Thank you!

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