

**Guidelines on Complex Trauma Assessment Process:
Excerpted from the NCTSN Complex Trauma Assessment Guidelines, With Adaptations Recommended
by the NYS Complex Trauma Workgroup**

How to Conduct a Comprehensive Assessment of Complex Trauma

The assessment of complex trauma is by definition “complex” as it involves both assessing children’s exposure to multiple traumatic events, as well as the wide---ranging and severe impact of this trauma exposure across domains of development. It is important that mental health providers, family members, and other caregivers become aware of specific questions to ask when seeking the most effective services for these children.

The following are some key steps for conducting a comprehensive assessment of complex trauma:

1. Assess for a wide range of traumatic events, with an initial screener and a more comprehensive assessment. Determine when they occurred so that they can be linked to developmental stages.
 - **Suggested Trauma Exposure Screen: Complex Trauma Exposure Screen**
 - **Suggested Trauma Assessment: Complex Trauma Exposure Assessment**
2. Assess for a wide range of symptoms (beyond PTSD), risk behaviors, functional impairments, and developmental derailments. NOTE: *It is important to look at clinically significant functional impairments as they relate to complex trauma (i.e., that the impairments cannot be better accounted for by a different diagnosis and are occurring in relation to the child’s reported traumatic experiences).*
 - **Clinicians/Evaluators should have flexibility in choosing measures to assess for the aforementioned impairments, yet need to justify the reasoning for utilizing such assessments for a particular youth.**
 - **Suggested Behavioral/Functional Impairment Assessment Screens are those recommended by (but not limited to) the NCTSN website¹:**
3. Gather information using a variety of techniques (clinical interviews, standardized measures, and behavioral observations).
4. Gather information from a variety of perspectives (child, caregivers, teachers, direct care staff members, other providers, etc).
5. Try to make sense of how each traumatic event might have impacted developmental tasks and derailed future development. Note: this may be challenging given the number of pervasive and chronic traumatic events a child may have experienced throughout his or her young life.
6. Try to link traumatic events to trauma reminders that may trigger symptoms or avoidant behavior. Remember that trauma reminders can be remembered both in explicit memory and out of awareness in the child’s body and emotions.
7. The assessment should be conducted by a **clinically trained** provider who **understands child development and complex trauma²**.
 - **Suggested Complex Trauma Evaluators:** Ideally, the assessment should involve a multi---disciplinary team, including a pediatrician, mental health professional, educational specialist, and, where appropriate, an occupational therapist.
 - In residential, day treatment, and juvenile justice settings, a multi---disciplinary team might also include direct care staff familiar with the child.
8. The licensed professional that is conducting the Complex Trauma Assessments and determination should not be within the same supervisory/program structure as the Health Home program and care manager assigned to the child. Care Management Agencies and Health Homes must ensure the Complex Trauma Assessment process is Conflict Free.

¹ <http://www.nctsn.org/content/standardized---measures---assess---complex---trauma>

² <http://www.nctsn.org/trauma---types/complex---trauma/assessment>