

## **Post Traumatic Symptom Inventory for Children PT-SIC**

*4th Validation version*

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### Keyed and un-keyed administrations

If a recent potentially traumatic event is known to have occurred, than questions in this instrument can be keyed to the known event. In this case, phrases such as “bad thing(s) that happened” and “what happened” can be substituted by naming the event. If such a history has not been established, or multiple traumatic events may have occurred, than it is recommend that the items be administered in an un-keyed manner. Even when a history of one or more potentially traumatic events is known to have occurred, it is advised that items A-K on the pre-test life events screen be administered to establish whether other possible traumas or related fears are present in the child’s life.

### Administration and Scoring

Each item is broken down into two essential elements creating a two level decision tree. The first part of each question is used as a general all or nothing screening item to see if the child acknowledges experiencing the general symptom in any form, at any time (e.g., Do you ever have really scary dreams?). If the child fails to acknowledge that they have ever experienced this symptom, they get a score of zero for the item, and the tester goes on to the next question. If the child does acknowledge the symptom, the tester goes on to administer the next level of the question, which is designed to specify the frequency each symptom is experienced (i.e., “a real lot – like almost everyday” or “just sometimes”). “Sometimes” is scored as 1 and “Almost everyday, or all the time” is scored as 2.

This symptom inventory is best used to assess whether children are meeting the criteria for PTSD rather than assigning a cumulative score on the test as a general index of trauma related pathology. Therefore, it is recommended that clinicians look to see which symptoms the child acknowledges experiencing. For example, if a child scores 2 or more points within a given section, than they would qualify for that DSM-IV symptom criteria. Cumulative scores can also be used for research purposes.

### Item administration

In adapting the items to be administered to very young children, two main concerns were addressed. One major issue was that many likert scales come with general labels or anchors that need to be explained repeatedly to the child. A problem with this method is that there is a lack of standardization of how the range of alternatives are explained across cases, or even from item to item within a given administration. Secondly, the repeated explanation of the likert scale to young children can often be an awkward and cumbersome task that leaves too much room for error. Therefore, it was decided that each question should have a brief script that can be read verbatim. This reduces variability in the explanation of alternatives and eliminates the need to repeatedly read and interpret the scale to each child. However, it should be noted that testers should not

be discouraged from paraphrasing items and/or elaborating on explanations after each question has been read verbatim to the child. Clarification of questions should be done on an *as needed* basis. In addition, testers should never discourage children from elaborating on their fears and related symptoms during the administration of the measure. This is both therapeutic and useful in gathering information relevant to each child's clinical presentation and understanding of the items.

Built in breaks and pauses. It should be emphasized that young children often have a difficult time understanding long and complex inquiries, even when the words used in the questions are well within their ability to comprehend. When faced with long sentences involving multiple propositions, young children often respond to the beginning or the end of the inquiry while missing the gist of the question all together. Therefore, the elements of each question on this test are broken down into understandable bits, by building pauses into each item to help young children break longer sentences down into their component parts. *Pauses are signified by a hyphen.* Try to pause each time you come to a hyphen within a question. Repeat questions when necessary and paraphrase if it appears the child does not understand what is being asked of them.

### Validity Index

A validity index is built into the test to assess each child's acknowledgement of everyday complaints and their understanding of the item content. The last item on the pre-test screen for traumatic life events and related fears, and the first item on the test, provide a simple validity check to see if the child will acknowledge everyday complaints and fears. The last item on the pre-test screen asks; *"What are you really scared of?"* If the child denies having any fears, than the tester states; *"Everyone is scared of something. -- What are you scared of?"* If the child refused to acknowledge any fears, then the tester asks; *"Is there something that you are just a little scared of?"*

The first item of the test asks if the child has scary dreams. It is generally accepted that all children have experienced having a scary dream sometime in their life (usually more than one). If the child refuses to acknowledge this experience, the examiner should say to the child; *"Have you ever had a scary dream?"* If they say yes, then proceed by asking the second part of the question. If they say no, the examiner should say; *"Everybody has some scary dreams. -- Have you every had one?"* If the child continues to deny ever having had a scary dream, the tester should engage the child in a discussion about their dreams to assess if they remember their dreams, or if they understand what is being asked of them.

It should be noted that some very young children may not have sufficiently developed language skills to respond to all of the items on this measure (particularly 4-year olds with underdeveloped receptive language skills). Responses on the two validity items provide some indication of a child's ability and/or willingness to reliably respond to the questions offered, and to acknowledge everyday complaints. If a child appears to have trouble with either of these items, the tester should proceed with caution, noting that the results of the test may not be valid. Alternatively, it is possible that some children may

not have any recall for their dreams at all, and/or they may have few if any serious fears . This is somewhat rare but not entirely uncommon.

### Asking for Examples

Several questions have a prompt for the examiner to ask the child for examples of various experiences. This is designed to assess the child's understanding of complex questions. These prompts also provide the examiner with a clearer understanding of the child's report and an opportunity to explore clinically significant phenomena with the child.

### Tips for administration

Remember, young children respond best when they are directly engaged with maximal social support. Reading the test items in a monotone manner from across the room is not the best way to get maximal results. Try and be animated and engaging throughout the test. Many traumatized children are quite active and inattentive. This creates an extremely challenging interview environment. Try and redirect the child's attention as needed without scarifying rapport.

**Pre-Test Screen For Traumatic Life Events and Related Fears**

*The following should be read verbatim*

Sometimes really bad or scary things happen. Sometimes these things can make you feel scared or sad when you think about them. Did any really bad or scary thing ever happen to you?

*If the child says No, ask:* Do you ever feel really scared?

*If the child denies that such events have ever occurred, than administer items A-K.*

*If he/she describes or acknowledges the occurrence of a potentially traumatic event with or without describing it, **then you can ask A-K, or proceed to item #1.***

(A) Do you ever hear gun shots around your home or school?

(B) Were you ever scared of getting shot with a gun or stabbed with a knife?

(C) Do you know anyone who was ever shot with a gun or stabbed with a knife?

(D) Did anyone ever hit you-- and hurt you real bad?

*Regardless of the child's response, ask the following questions in series, pausing for a response before proceeding to the next part of the question.*

Did anyone ever hit you with their hand? -- Or hit you with a belt? -- Or hit you with a stick or anything else? -- Were you ever scared that someone would hurt you real bad?

(E) Did anyone ever tell you that they were going to hurt you real bad -- or say they would kill you?

(F) **Optional**-Has anyone ever touched your private parts (*substitute child's name for genitals*) -- or did someone ever tell you to touch theirs?

*If yes:* How did that make you feel?

(G) Were you ever in a car crash? --or --Were you ever in a fire? --or --Did you ever get hurt very bad doing something?

(H) Did you ever see a car crash, or a big fire?- or -Did you ever see someone get hurt very bad?

*If yes, than ask about the details and say:* How did this make you feel?

(I) Do you ever feel very scared?

(J) Do you ever feel really scared that something bad will happen to you?

(K) **Validity check** What are you really scared of?

*If the child denies having any fears, say:* Everyone is scared of something. -- What are you scared of?

*If the child continues to deny having any fears, then ask:* Is there something that you are just a little scared of?

I want to ask you some questions about this (these)  
bad thing(s) that has (have) happened to you.

Recurrent distressing dreams of the event; or frightening dreams without recognizable content

1. Most all children have really scary dreams.

Do you ever have really scary dreams?

*IF YES: Do you have scary dreams a real lot--like almost every night? Or, do you just have scary dreams sometimes?*

**Validity Check**

*If NO, say: "Have you ever had a scary dream?"*

*If they then say yes, proceed by asking the second part of the question.*

*If they continue to say no, the examiner should say "Everybody has some scary dreams -- Have you ever had a scary dream?"*

*If they now say yes, then proceed by asking the second part of the question.*

*If the child continues to deny ever having had a scary dream, the tester should engage the child in a discussion about their dreams to assess if they ever remember their dreams or understand what is being asked of them.*

0 1 2

2. Some children have scary dreams about things that really happened.

Do you ever have scary dreams about things that really happened to you?

*Do you have scary dreams like that a real lot--like almost every night? Or, do you just have these dreams sometimes?*

0 1 2

Recurrent intrusive, distressing recollections of the event.

3. Some children think about really bad things that happened them.

Do you think about really bad things that happened to you?

\*Do you think about those bad things even when you don't want to?

*If the child responded yes to the first part of the question, then proceed to the next level of the item even if they say No to the second part of the question.*

*Do you think about those bad things a real lot--like almost everyday? Or, do you just think about those bad things sometimes?*

0 1 2

4. Some children see pictures of really bad or scary things when they close their eyes (*tester closes their own eyes*).

When you close your eyes (*tester closes their own eyes*), do you ever see pictures of really bad or scary things?

*When you close your eyes (Tester closes their own eyes)--Do you see these pictures a real lot--like almost everyday? Or, do*

*you see those really bad or scary pictures just sometimes when you close your eyes?*

0 1 2

Repetitive play with themes of the event

5. Some children play games and pretend really bad or scary things are happening to them.

Do you ever play games and pretend really bad or scary things are happening to you?

*Do you play games like that a real lot--like almost everyday? Or, do you just play games like that sometimes?*

0 1 2

6. Some children play games where they pretend someone gets hurt-or pretend someone dies.

Do you ever play games where you pretend someone gets hurt-or pretend someone dies?

*Do you play these games a real lot--like almost everyday? Or, do you just play games like that sometimes?*

0 1 2

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**Before asking the next two questions say:  
ñ Now I am going to ask you about some really bad or scary stuff  
that happened to youí**

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Efforts to avoid thoughts feelings or conversations associated with the event

7. Some children try real hard not to think about really bad or scary stuff that happened to them.

Do you ever try real hard to not think about bad or scary things that happened to you?

*Do you try to not think about bad or scary stuff a real lot--like almost all the time? Or, do you try to not think about that bad or scary stuff just sometimes?*

0 1 2

Acting or feeling as if the event were recurring. Including reliving the event, illusions, hallucinations, Dissociative flashback episodes; or trauma specific reenactments

8. Some children feel like some bad thing that happened to them a long time ago- is happening all over again.-- I mean, they feel like something bad or scary is happening, even when it's not really happening? --They just feel like it is.

Do you ever feel like some bad thing that happened to you a long time ago- is happening to you again,-- even when it's not really happening?

**If the say yes:** *Ask the child to describe the event to make sure they understand the question.*

*Do you feel like that a real lot--like almost everyday? Or, do you just feel this way sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

Efforts to avoid activities places or people that arouse recollections of the trauma

**9.** Some children feel scared to leave their home,- or room --because something bad might happen.

Do you ever feel scared to leave your home,-or your room -- because something bad might happen?

*Are you afraid a real lot--like almost all the time? Or, are you just afraid sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

**10.** Some children try to stay away from scary things-- because those things make them think about bad stuff that have happened to them.

Are there scary things you like to stay away from?

*Do you do this a real lot--like almost all the time? Or, do you just stay away from those scary things sometimes.*

**0 1 2**

Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma

**11.** Some children can't remember bad or scary things.

Is it sometimes hard for you to remember bad or scary things?

**If Yes:** *Ask for an example. Is it almost always hard to remember those bad or scary things? Or, is it just hard to remember bad or scary stuff sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

**12.** Are there really bad or scary things that happened to you that you forgot happened?

*Do you mean you can never remember those bad things that happened to you? Or, you just can't remember that bad stuff sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

Marked diminished interest in participation in significant activities

**13.** When bad things happen some children don't want to play as much.

After really bad or scary things happen to you, do you not want to play as much anymore?

*Do you mean you don't want to play a real lot-like almost all the time or everyday? Or, do you just not want to play sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

**14.** Some children just don't feel like doing fun stuff.

Do you ever not feel like doing fun stuff?

*Do you feel like you don't want to do fun stuff a real lot-like almost all the time--or everyday? Or, do you feel that way just sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

Feeling detached or estranged from others

**15.** Some children feel like people don't like them.

Do you feel like people don't like you sometimes?

*Do you feel like nobody likes you? Or, do you feel like just some people don't like you, sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

**16.** After bad things happen, some children don't want to talk to anybody.

When really bad or scary things happen to you, do you not want to talk to anybody?

*Do you mean you don't want to talk to anybody a real lot-like almost all the time? Or, do you feel like that just sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

Restricted range of affect (unable to experience loving feelings)

**17.** Some children are not very happy.

Is it hard for you to feel happy?

*Is it hard to feel happy a real lot-like everyday? Or, is it just hard to feel happy sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

**18.** Some children are sad a lot.

Are you sad a lot?

*Are you sad a real lot-like almost all the time, or everyday? Or, do you just feel sad sometimes?*

**0 1 2**

Sense of foreshortened future. Does not expect to have a career, children, or normal life span.

**19.** Some children think that they will die before they

grow up.

Do you ever worry that you will die before you grow up?  
*Do you worry about dying a real lot--like almost all the time? Or, do you just worry about dying sometimes?*

0 1 2

#### Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep

20. Some children can't fall asleep when they really want to.

Is it ever hard for you to fall asleep when you really want to?

*Is it hard to fall asleep a real lot-like almost every night? Or, is it just hard to fall asleep sometimes?*

0 1 2

21. Some children can't fall asleep because they are thinking about bad or scary things that happened.

Is it ever hard for you to sleep--because your thinking about really bad or scary things?

*Is it hard for you to sleep a real lot-like almost every night? Or, is it just hard to sleep sometimes?*

0 1 2

#### Irritability and outbursts of anger

22. When some children get mad--they scream and yell and can't stop.

Do you ever scream and yell when you get mad? *Do you scream and yell when you get mad a real lot-like almost all the time, or everyday? Or, do you just scream and yell sometimes?*

0 1 2

23. Some children want to hurt other people.

Do you ever feel like you want to hurt other people?  
*Do you want to hurt other people a real lot-like almost all the time, or everyday? Or, do you just feel that way sometimes?*

0 1 2

24. Some children get mad or upset real easy.

Do you get mad or upset real easy?  
*Do you get mad a real lot-like almost all the time, or everyday? Or, do you just get mad sometimes?*

0 1 2

\* Difficulty concentrating

25. Some children forget things a lot?

Do you forget things a lot?

**If yes:** Ask for examples

*Do you forget things a real lot-like almost all the time, or everyday? Or, do you just forget things sometimes?*

0 1 2

26. Some children learn how to play a game and then forget how to do it.

Do you forget how to play games a lot?

*Do you forget how to play games a real lot-like almost all the time, or everyday? Or, do you just forget how to play sometimes?*

0 1 2

\* Hypervigilance

27. Some children are always scared something really bad will happen.

Are you ever scared something really bad will happen?

*Are you scared something bad will happen a real lot-like almost all the time or everyday? Or, are you just scared sometimes?*

0 1 2

28. Some children are scared of other people.

Are you scared of some people?

*Are you scared of most people? Or, are you just scared of some people?*

0 1 2

**Exaggerated startle response**

29. Some children get surprised real easy.

Do you get surprised real easy?

*Do you get surprised a real lot-like almost all the time? Or, do you just get surprised real easy sometimes?*

0 1 2

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\* This symptom can not be readily assessed with age appropriate language for children as young as four years of age with an objective self-report test.

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**30.** Some children jump up or get real scared when they hear a real loud noise.

Do you ever jump up or get real scared when you hear a loud noise like this(*tester hits hand on desk or claps hands*)?

*Does this happen a real lot-like almost all the time? Or, do you just get scared when you hear a loud noise sometimes?*

**0 1 2**