

Four-Year-Old Benji: Freeze Response

Benji, a four-year-old child in a Head Start classroom, was home when a water heater in his apartment building exploded; the explosion started a fire and lead to the evacuation of his building and two of the residents being transported by ambulance to the local emergency room. Ever since this traumatic event, Benji has been very sensitive and frightened when he hears loud noises. One morning, the school fire alarm is accidentally triggered, and all the children are told by their teacher to line up and walk outside to wait on the playground until the firefighters come and determine that the site is safe and that they can return to their classroom. All the children walk outside as they are asked to do except Benji, who is later found by the program director who sees him standing in the corner of the room, holding his ears, completely frozen and unable to move. He is unresponsive to the director's touch, verbal direction, or guidance. Benji is staring into space, completely unresponsive to all the stimulation and sounds around him.