

After the Trauma: Helping My Child Cope

THINGS PARENTS CAN DO AND SAY



Six things you can do to help your child after a trauma.

- 1 Let your children know they are safe.** Give them extra hugs, even your teenagers. Younger children may need more cuddle time.
- 2 Allow children to talk about their feelings and worries, if they want to.** Let them know that being a little scared and upset is normal. *If they don't want to talk*, allow your child to share his or her feelings by writing stories or drawing pictures about the event.
- 3 Return to normal routines.** Help your child get plenty of sleep, eat regular meals, keep up with schoolwork and go back to spending time with friends.
- 4 Increase time with family and friends.** Children who get support from others, particularly family and friends, seem to cope better after upsetting events. Try family activities like reading, playing sports or games, or watching movies together.
- 5 Take time to deal with your own reactions.** If you are worried or upset, your children will feel upset, too. Talk about your feelings with other adults, such as family, friends, clergy, your doctor or a counselor.
- 6 People in the same family can react in different ways.** Remember, your child's reactions might be different from yours.

What should I expect in the first days and weeks after the trauma? During the first few days after a trauma, your child might feel confused, upset, jumpy or worried. *Feeling this way is normal.* Also, some parents think that when their child (or brothers or sisters) talk about or seem upset after a trauma, it means there is something wrong. Usually, nothing is wrong. *Most children need a little extra time to adjust.*

When should I get extra help for my child? If your child's reactions do not clear up or *seem to get worse*, or if there are other things that worry you, seek additional help.

What are common changes in my child? Different children react differently after a trauma. Changes you might notice in your child include:

- 👉 **Young children:** thumb sucking, bed wetting, clinging to parents, being afraid of the dark
- 👉 **Elementary children:** getting easily upset or angry, clinging to parents, nightmares, not paying attention, not wanting to go to school or play with friends
- 👉 **Teenage children:** changes in sleeping and eating routines, new problems in school, arguments with friends and family, complaining of feeling sick

Where should I get help? There are helpful treatments available for children who continue to have problems after a trauma. If you're not sure what to do, talk to *your child's doctor or school counselor* to figure out the best way to help your child and your family.

For more information:

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.nctsn.org
American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org/family
National Association of School Psychologists: www.nasponline.org



Things other parents have found helpful.

- Do:** Allow your child to talk about what happened, if he or she wants to.
- Say:** *"A lot has happened. Is there anything you're worried about or something that I can help you understand?"*
- Do:** If your child doesn't want to talk about what happened, encourage him or her to draw a picture or write a story about it.
- Say:** *(To younger children) "Can you draw a picture about what happened and tell me a story about it?" (To teenage children) "Can you write a story about what happened and how you're feeling?"*
- Do:** Keep in mind that brothers and sisters could also feel upset or worried.
- Say:** *"How are you doing? Is there anything you are worried about?"*
- Do:** Maintain your child's regular meal and bed times. If sleep is a problem for your child, try a bedtime story and a favorite stuffed animal for younger children, some quiet time and relaxing music for teens.
- Say:** *(To younger children) "Let's read your favorite book before going to bed." (To teenage children) "How about listening to music that helps you relax?"*
- Do:** Talk to another adult if you are feeling upset about what happened to your child. Also, talk to your child's doctor if you are concerned about how he or she is dealing with the trauma.
- Say:** *"I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. It would help if I have someone to talk to for a little while."*

YOUNGER CHILDREN:



"You're safe now."



"Why don't you draw a picture about your time in the hospital."

OLDER CHILDREN:



"You can still spend time with your friends."



"When I'm upset, I find someone to talk to."

NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

CPTS

Center for Pediatric Traumatic Stress
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

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