

Traumatic Stress in Ill or Injured Children

AFTER THE ABC'S CONSIDER THE DEF'S

D

Distress

- Assess and manage pain.
- Ask about fears and worries.
- Consider grief and loss.

E

Emotional
Support

- Who and what does the patient need now?
- Barriers to mobilizing existing supports?

F

Family

- Assess parents' or siblings' and others' distress.
- Gauge family stressors and resources.
- Address other needs (beyond medical.)



QUICK SCREEN

Is this child at risk for ongoing traumatic stress reactions?

ASK PARENT: Since this has happened, does your child...

- get **Physical** symptoms if reminded of the illness or injury?
- try not to **Talk** about it?
- **Startle** easily (for example, jump at sudden noises?)
- get very **Distressed** if reminded of the illness or injury?

ASK CHILD:

- Have you been really scared or thought you might die?
- Does a sudden noise really make you jump?
- Do you feel very upset when something reminds you of being sick or hurt?
- Do you have people who care about you and pay attention to what you say?

REMEMBER RISK FACTORS:

- Severe pain at any time?
- Exposed to scary sights and sounds?
- Separated from parents or caretakers?
- Loved ones ill or injured? Did anyone die?
- Other losses such as, home, pet, belongings?
- Is child mourning loss of ability, body image, or future?
- Prior scary experiences?
- Prior behavior problems?

If multiple concerns or risk factors present, arrange follow-up and consider referral for further assessment.



D

Distress

How to Assess: Distress

TRAUMATIC STRESS IN ILL OR INJURED CHILDREN



Pain: Use your hospital's pediatric pain assessment. Ask:

- **Current pain:** "How is your pain right now?"
- **Worst pain:** "What was the worst pain you have had since this happened?"

Fears and Worries:

- "Sometimes children are scared or upset when something like this happens. Is there anything that has been scary or upsetting for you?"
- "What worries you most?"

Grief or Loss:

- Anyone else hurt or ill?
- Other recent losses? (loss/damage to home, pet, etc.)

NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

www.NCTSN.net

How to help: Distress

Tips to help families of injured or ill children

- 1 Provide the child with as much control as possible over the clinical encounter. The child should:**
 - understand what is about to happen
 - have a say in what is about to happen
 - have some control over pain management
- 2 Actively assess and treat pain.**
 - Use your hospital's pain management protocol
- 3 Listen carefully to hear how the child understands what is happening.**
 - After explaining diagnosis or procedure, ask the child to say it back to you.
 - Remember that the child's understanding may be incomplete or in error.
- 4 Clarify any misconceptions.**
 - Provide accurate information.
 - Use words and ideas the child can understand.
- 5 Provide reassurance and realistic hope.**
 - Describe what is being done to help the child get better.
 - State that there are many people working together to help the child.
- 6 Pay attention to grief and loss.**
 - Mobilize your hospital's bereavement service and/or grief protocols.
 - Encourage parents to listen to their child's concerns and be open to talking about their child's experience.

E

Emotional Support

How to Assess: Emotional Support

TRAUMATIC STRESS IN ILL OR INJURED CHILDREN



What Does The Child Need Now?

- Ask parents: “What helps your child cope with upsetting or scary things?”
- Ask child: “What has been the best thing so far that helps you feel better?”

Who Is Available To Help The Child?

- Do the parents understand the illness or injury and treatment plan?
- Are they able to help calm their child?
- Are they able to be with their child for procedures?

How Can Existing Supports Be Mobilized?

- Ask parents: “Who can you or your child usually turn to for help or support? Are they aware of what’s happened?”

NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

www.NCTSN.org

How to help: Emotional Support

Tips to help families of injured or ill children

1 Encourage parent presence.

- Encourage parents to be with their child as much as possible during hospital stay.
- Encourage parents to talk with their child about worries, hopes, etc.
- Parents know their child better than anyone, and can help staff understand their child's needs and coping strengths.

2 Empower parents to comfort and help their child.

- Help parents understand the illness or injury and treatment plan — so that they can give age-appropriate explanations to their child.
- Encourage parents to use the ways they have learned to soothe and calm their child at home.
- Parents may welcome specific suggestions from staff about how to help their child during procedures — e.g., “You can hold his hand and talk to him while we do this.”

3 Encourage social support & involvement in “normal” activities.

- Suggest age-appropriate positive activities that fit the child's medical status (play, family time, videos.)
- Promote the child's appropriate contact with friends, classmates, teachers (letters, calls, email.)



F

Family

How to Assess: Family

TRAUMATIC STRESS IN ILL OR INJURED CHILDREN



Assess Parents' or Siblings' and Others' Distress

- “Have you or other family members been very upset since this happened?”
- “Who is having an especially difficult time?”

Gauge Family Stressors & Resources

- “Are there other stresses for your family right now?”
- “Have you been able to get some sleep?
To eat regularly?”

Address Other Needs (Beyond Medical)

- “Are there other worries (money, housing, etc.) that make it especially hard to deal with this right now?”

NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

www.NCTSN.net

How to help: Family

Tips to help families of injured or ill children

1 Encourage parents' basic self-care.

- Encourage parents to take care of themselves. They need sleep, nutrition, and breaks from the hospital.

2 Remember family members' emotional needs.

- Help them to enlist support systems (friends, family, faith community)
- If parents or other family members are having difficulty coping,
 - use hospital services (chaplain, family support services)
 - consider referral of parent to mental health professional.

3 Be sensitive to resource needs of the family.

- These issues can significantly interfere with the child's recovery. If problems are identified, utilize psychosocial resources (e.g., social work services) to address them.
- Housing
- Finances
- Insurance
- Language/Translation
- Immigration
- Care of other children