

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is an emotional or physical reaction to an event that is witnessed or experienced by a child or adolescent and is disturbing to them. Examples of events that can be traumatic are:

- Being a victim of physical or sexual abuse
- Witnessing violence within the family or community - murder, gangs, bullying
- Witnessing violence on television, movies, or video games
- Loss of a loved one due to accident, illness, disease, or violence
- Loss or displacement due to a natural disaster - fire, tornado, earthquake, hurricane
- Loss due to traffic accidents - injury, death, disability
- Loss of a relative or friend due to suicide
- Exposure to an act of war or terrorism

HOW CAN TRAUMA AFFECT MY CHILD?

A child may:

- feel scared and less secure
- think the family has changed and nothing can be the same as before
- be less confident and have decreased self-esteem
- think about suicide or harming themselves
- not want to participate in regular activities

WHEN SHOULD I GET HELP FOR MY CHILD?

Your child may need help if you notice any of these problems:

- Not wanting to go to school
- Doing worse in school
- Fear of leaving the house
- Withdrawing from friends and/or family
- Watching out for danger all the time
- Exhibiting rebellious or risky behaviors
- Increased conflict with family members or friends
- Appearing sad, unhappy, or depressed
- Making statements that no one cares, or wanting to harm themselves
- Running away

	CHILDREN REACT TO TRAUMA DIFFERENTLY AT DIFFERENT AGES. SOME BEHAVIORS YOU MAY SEE INCLUDE...	WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD...
ALL AGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Problems sleeping, including nightmares ○ Physical complaints like headaches or stomach aches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Try to keep usual routines for meals, sleep, play, school ○ Spend time with your child and be a good listener
AGES 2 TO 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fear of being separated from parents and exhibiting clinging behaviors ○ Aggressive behaviors, or crying and withdrawal ○ Acting out traumatic events while playing ○ Being unable to comfort themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reassure children that you and other people will do everything you can to keep them safe ○ Encourage children to play or talk about their feelings or thoughts ○ Give simple and realistic answers to their questions
AGES 6-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Worrying about safety or even death ○ Returning to behaviors shown at younger ages ○ Fearfulness ○ Being highly agitated or irritable ○ Easily upset or angry ○ Behavior problems at home or school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Try to clear up any incorrect information they may have ○ Give them simple and realistic answers to their questions ○ Set gentle, but firm limits for "acting out" behavior ○ Encourage participation in routine activities ○ Decrease viewing stimulating tv, movies, and video games
AGES 12-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeling angry, sad, or depressed ○ Having problems concentrating ○ Increased conflicts with family or at school ○ Delinquent behavior ○ Decline in school performance ○ Suicide attempts ○ Use of alcohol or drugs ○ Increased sexual activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage them to discuss the traumatic event or their behavior with a professional or someone they trust ○ Don't dodge their questions; answer with facts ○ Help them see the connection between their behaviors and how they feel about the events ○ Encourage participation in routine activities ○ Set clear limits, address reckless and aggressive behaviors

WHEN SHOULD I GET HELP FOR MYSELF?

If you are feeling overwhelmed dealing with your child's reactions, you may want to talk to your child's physician, a family member, close friend, community elder, or other helpers like a mental health professional. When you do not know what to do, it is best to ask for help from someone who works with children or has experience dealing with exposure to trauma. It can be helpful to talk to your child's teachers, counselors, coaches, or other youth helpers as they can assist you in building a supportive network for your child.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD...

- Let your child talk about what happened if he wants to; do not ask a lot of questions and do not keep bringing it up.
- Assure your child that many children feel sad or upset when a traumatic event happens to them.
- Tell your child that,
 - "It's okay to feel a little scared. I'm here if you want to talk and I'll try to help you feel better."
 - "A lot has happened. Is there anything you're worried about or that I can help you better understand?"
 - "I will be here when you want to talk about what happened. It is important that you talk about it. If you would rather talk to a counselor, I will find one for you to talk to."
- Pay attention to your child's moods and behaviors. Encourage them to talk about why they are feeling happy, angry or sad.
- Give your child extra hugs, even your teen. Younger children may need extra cuddling and rocking.
- Support your child's wishes if he wants to talk to a traditional or ceremonial elder or healer, a member of an organized church, or a mental health professional.
- Encourage your child to draw a picture or write a story about what happened and then ask them to tell you about it.
- Read your child a book each night.
- Encourage your child or teen to make plans for future activities and events.

For more information contact:

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WHAT IS TRAUMA?

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



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