

Signs of Traumatic Stress in Children

Preschool Children

- Feel helpless, uncertain
- Fear of being separated from their parent/caregiver
- Cry and/or scream a lot
- Eat poorly and lose weight
- Return to bedwetting and/or baby talk
- Have nightmares
- Develop new fears
- Recreate the trauma through play
- Are not developing to the next stage of growth
- Ask questions about death

Elementary School Children

- Become anxious and fearful
- Worry about their own or others' safety
- Become clingy with a teacher or a parent/caregiver
- Feel guilt or shame
- Tell others about the traumatic event again and again
- Become upset if they get a small bump or bruise
- Have a hard time concentrating
- Experience numbness
- Have fears that the event will happen again
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Show changes in school performance

Middle and High School Children

- Feel depressed and alone
- Discuss the traumatic event in detail
- Develop self-harming behaviors (cutting, eating disorders)
- Start using or abusing drugs and/or alcohol
- Become sexually active
- Feel like they are going crazy
- Feel different from everyone else
- Have sleep disturbances
- Don't want to go to places that remind them of the event
- Say they have no feeling about the event
- Show changes in behavior

What is a Trauma Reminder?

A trauma reminder is a trigger. Triggers are: places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and/or feelings that remind the victim of their traumatic event(s).

As caregivers you can let your child know how much you want to help them when they experience those triggers.

- It is helpful to be open about how you yourself are also still affected by reminders.
- You can offer each other emotional support through physical comfort (if they are comfortable), understanding, and reassurance.

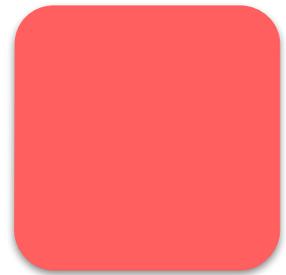


The **Fight-or-Flight** response is common in victims of trauma. It is an intense desire to flee a scene or stay and fight. Ordinary, everyday events can trigger this response (sometimes called a panic attack). It may not be a response the victim can control well, or even at all, as people are effected differently than others by trauma. With time, and help, victims have been able to cope with these panic attacks.

Children can and do recover from traumatic events. As parents/caregivers you can help your children and family cope with the stress reactions that follow these events. Try to maintain a balanced perspective; take your child's reaction seriously, but maintain a hopeful belief that your child will heal and that your family will recover, too.

What Can My Family Do to Recover?

- Be patient. There is no correct timetable for healing. Reassure your child that they do not need to feel guilty or bad about their thoughts or feelings.
 - Explain to your child that he or she is not responsible for what happened. Children sometimes blame themselves for events completely out of their control.
 - Assure your child that he or she is safe. Talk about the measures you are taking to keep him or her safe at home and about what safety measures his/her school is also taking.
 - Maintain regular home (mealtime, bedtime) and school routines to support the process of recovery. Make sure your child continues to go to school and stays in school.
 - Take time to think about your own experience of your child's traumatic event and any past traumatic events you may have experienced. Your own trauma history and your feelings about your child's trauma event will influence how you react.
 - Contact a qualified mental health professional if your child's distress continues for several weeks.
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Keep in Mind:

- Don't take the child's behavior personally.
- Avoid yelling or aggressive behavior.
- Lowering your own vocal tone and intensity can help calm your child.
- Tell the child it's ok to feel what they feel and to show their emotions.
- Help the child to label what they are feeling.
- Create and practice calming techniques with your child, both when they are upset and when they are not upset, so they get used to what to do.
- Guide the child at first, then just remind the child to use his/her skills when you see s/he is starting to get upset.
- Give messages that say the child is safe, wanted, capable, and worthwhile and that you, as caretaker, are available, reliable, and responsive.
- Praise even neutral behavior.
- Be aware of your own emotional responses to the child's behavior.



24-Hour Crisis Hotline
(530) 244-0117