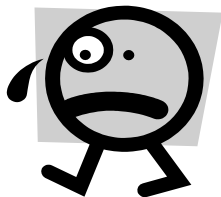


HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD FOLLOWING A TRAUMATIC EVENT

The first step in helping your child with a traumatic situation is to recognize what a traumatic event might be. A traumatic situation is one that causes a child or family member a great deal of pain and could include:

- Death of a family member or pet
- Divorce
- Illness
- Family move or friend moving away
- Change in school
- Parent loss of a job
- Natural disaster
- Threat of violence

Keep in mind that all children and adults handle difficult situations in different ways. This information describes various types of responses you might find yourself experiencing and changes you might see in your child.



PARENT TIPS

These are normal reactions that you might experience as an adult:

- Easily irritated
- Cries a lot
- Difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawal
- Trouble sleeping
- Eating problems
- Stomach aches or headaches
- Anxiety or depression
- Fear of recurrence of event
- Recurring dreams of event
- Flash backs of event

In order to help you deal with these reactions, it is important that you:

- Get enough rest
- Have someone to talk to
- Share your feelings and fears
- Make time for physical activity
- Eat well
- Take time off from work if necessary

Recognize that experiencing one or more of these reactions are normal. Try to seek immediate crisis counseling after the event of a trauma. If this is not possible, and you find that your child demonstrates some of the following responses and/or has not recovered from the trauma within a month, a referral to a mental health professional is recommended to help your child work through the traumatic event.

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

5 years old or younger

- Feelings of helplessness and passivity
- Regressive symptoms
- Denial of event
- Re-enactment of trauma through art and play
- Nightmares

6 years through 11 years old

- Clear thinking is reduced
- Fantasy increases
- Phobic responses
- Personality changes
- Obsessive re-enactment of the event
- Nightmares

12 years through 17 years old

- Detachment, shame or guilt
- Post-traumatic acting out behavior
- Life-attitudes changes/loss of interest
- Behaving as an adult who can take care of themselves without adult help (pseudo maturity)

TIPS ON HELPING YOUR CHILD

- Close your eyes take a deep breath. This will help you relax and gain control of your emotions.
- When you talk to your child be calm and have control of your emotions. Be strong. If you lose control, your child might become worried about you. This could make the situation more difficult for them to handle.
- Tell your child you love and care about them and want to know how they are feeling.
- Listen to your child's feelings. Validate what they are saying. If you are experiencing the same feelings, share them. Let your child know their feelings are normal. When sharing, be sure *not* to take the lead.
- Ask open-ended questions that will give your child permission to express their feelings. Explore their fears and concerns.
- Pay attention to your child's questions. Do not avoid difficult questions. Try to answer them. It is okay to say "I don't know" or "I don't have the answer, but I will get one for you."
- Let your child know you take their concerns seriously.
- If your child has a hard time talking about their feelings, let them know you will be there when they are ready to share. Give them some time of their own. If they do not bring the situation up within a day or two, introduce the subject again.
- If your child is verbal, find time daily to talk to them about how they are doing emotionally. Explore new feelings, fears and anxieties.
- If your child changes the way they talk, play or express attitude, this may indicate fears or anxieties they are unable to express.
- If your child likes to draw, let them make a picture that describes their worries or fears, which will tell you how they are feeling.
- Your child might express their feelings through their behavior. Major changes might include: aggression, withdrawal, or physical complaints that coincide with the trauma (ex: stomachaches or headaches.)



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TIPS FOR PARENTS

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