

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

- Trauma is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that leads to strong feelings of sadness, stress, or worry.
- Traumas can be natural disasters, like a hurricane or earthquake, or a typical life event, like sudden loss of a loved one. They can also be caused by other people. For example, as in sexual or physical abuse, a car accident, crime, or terrorist attack.
- Trauma is very common in childhood. In fact, most children experience a trauma before they turn 16.



HOW DO CHILDREN RESPOND TO TRAUMA?

- Almost everyone is sad, anxious or angry after a trauma. For most people, these responses are normal and go away over time (1 – 2 weeks).
- In some cases, these thoughts and feelings don't go away on their own and may get in the way of everyday life, which can result in the child needing more help.

SOME SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY NEED MORE SUPPORT

INCLUDE:

- Worrying a lot or feeling very anxious, sad, or fearful
- Crying often
- Having trouble thinking clearly or concentrating
- Having scary thoughts about the trauma
- Feeling angry
- Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping since the trauma
- Avoiding places or people that remind them of the trauma
- Physical symptoms like headaches, stomach pain and digestive issues, feeling tired, racing heart and sweating, being very jumpy and easily startled

RESOURCES

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml>

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treatment/children/ptsd_in_children_and_adolescents_overview_for_professionals.as

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types>

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- **Don't be afraid to talk about the trauma.** Children do not benefit from 'putting it out of their minds.'
- **Talk about it in a calm manner.** If a child feels that her parents are upset about the event, she will not want to talk about it. This makes the child's recovery even more difficult.
- **Let the child lead the conversation.** Let your child ease into talking about the event at their own pace.
- **When the child brings it up or seems to be thinking about it,** don't avoid discussion. Listen to the child, answer questions, and provide comfort and support.
- **We often have no adequate explanations** about senseless death or traumatic events. In the end, just listening to and comforting your child will have long-lasting positive effects on your child's ability to cope with the traumatic event.
- **It's okay to let children see that you are sad or upset.** It helps them know emotions are normal.
- **Keep a routine going for the child that helps them feel safe.** Children feel safe with structure and routines.
- **Allow for the child to regain control that they may have lost after a traumatic event.** Parents can provide the child with choices on tasks, such as picking out their clothes for the day or their snacks.

When should I seek professional help?

- For children who continue to show signs of trauma for months afterward, they may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- It is important to seek professional help if you are worried your child might have PTSD.
- A therapist, such as a psychologist, social worker or counselor, can help your child understand and manage her moods and feelings.
- Effective treatments for PTSD include talk therapy (such as, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; TF-CBT) or a combination of talk therapy and medicine.
- Get immediate help. If your child expresses thoughts about wanting to kill themselves or is saying scary things, call 911 or bring your child to the emergency department.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- *"The PTSD Workbook for Teens: Simple, Effective Skills for Healing Trauma"* by Libbi Palmer (2012)
- *"Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters: What Parents Can Do"* <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml>
- *National Child Traumatic Stress Network (guides for parents of children who have experienced trauma):* <https://www.nctsn.org/audiences/families-and-caregivers>
- *"How Little Coyote Found His Secret Strength: A Story About How to Get Through Hard Times"*, by Alicia Hu and Ching-Pang Kuo (2017)
- *A Terrible Thing Happened: A Story for Children who have Witnessed Violence or Trauma* by Margaret M. Holmes
- *Healing Days: A Guide for Kids Who have Experienced Trauma* by Susan Farber Straus, PhD