

FAST FACTS: Helping Children Cope with Trauma

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When children are exposed to traumatic events, their reactions are difficult to predict. When, how, and the severity of a child's reaction can vary significantly. One thing that is for certain is that when children experience a traumatic event, they turn to adults, particularly their parents, to protect them and make sense of the world for them.

In order to help children cope with trauma, parents and other adults in contact with the child need to be able to listen and hear the child's concerns. They need to help the child feel safe. It is important to remember that if the adults are traumatized, they need to find support for themselves and reach out to others for support for the child.

This FAST FACTS flyer will provide more information about possible indicators of childhood trauma, and how parents and other adults can intervene to try to help the child cope with the event.

Examples of Trauma

- Complex Trauma (multiple/prolonged exposure to trauma)
- Domestic Violence
- Early Childhood Trauma (experienced ages 0-6)
- Medical Trauma
- Natural Disasters
- Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Refugee/War Zone Trauma
- School Violence/Crises
- Sexual Abuse
- Terrorism
- Traumatic Grief (death of someone close)

When children have been exposed to situation during which they **feared for their lives**, believed they could have been **injured, witnessed violence**, or **tragically lost a loved one**, they may show signs of traumatic stress. If this is the case, you may notice the following signs:

- Difficulty sleeping and nightmares
- Refusing to go to school
- Lack of appetite
- Bed-wetting or other regression in behaviors
- Interference with developmental milestones
- Anger
- Getting into fights at school or fighting more with siblings
- Avoidance of scary situations
- Difficulty paying attention to teachers at school and to parents at home
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Nervousness or jumpiness
- Intrusive memories of what happened
- Play that includes recreating the event

How to Help Your Child at Home

1. Learn about the common reactions that children have to traumatic events.
2. Consult a qualified mental health professional if your child's distress continues for several weeks.
3. Assure your child of his/her safety at home and at school. Talk about what you've done to make him/her safe at home and what the school is doing to keep students safe.
4. Reassure your child that he/she is not responsible for the event.
5. Allow your child to express his/her fears and fantasies verbally or through play- it is a normal part of the recovery process.
6. Maintain regular home and school routines to support the process of recovery, but make sure your child continues going to school and stays in school.
7. Be patient. *There is no correct timetable for healing- some children recovery more quickly than others.* Do not push him or her to "get over it"- provide a safe space for children to express themselves.
8. Follow the child's lead:
 - If the child wants to talk, listen.
 - If the child wants to be held or picked up, do so.
 - If the child is clingy, be patient.
 - Allow children to show their fears; give support.
 - Help children identify their feelings.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network:
www.nctsn.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
Administrations' Disaster Technical Assistance
Center:
www.samsha.gov/dtac

Mental Health Services Locator
[Http://store.samhsa.gov/mhlocator](http://store.samhsa.gov/mhlocator)

Disaster Distress Helpline
1-800-985-5990

Child Welfare Information Gateway
1-800-4-A-CHILD

Administration for Children and Families
www.acf.hhs.gov

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK

How Adults Can Help Themselves AND Other Traumatized Adults

- Return to day to day structure as soon as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Seek out support from friends and colleagues
- Keep a journal
- Participate in activities that may distract you or feel good to you
- Try to be patient with others who are also under stress
- Give yourself permission to feel moody, nervous, or blue
- Try not to make any major life changes during a stressful time
- Make as many daily decisions as possible to have a feeling of control over your life
- Try to rest and eat balanced, regular meals

All information on this FAST FACT sheet can be found at:

www.nctsn.org
www.samhsa.gov