

What is Trauma?

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When people think of trauma, they often focus on physical injuries. However, people also can experience psychological trauma after witnessing or experiencing distressing events. Many children experience trauma through ongoing exposure, throughout their early development, to abuse, neglect, homelessness, domestic violence or violence in their communities. It is very clear that chronic long-term trauma can cause serious problems with the whole child.

After a traumatic event it is important for parents/guardians to identify their own feelings so they can help their children.

It is important to explain to children:

- You love them.
- The event was not their fault.
- You will do your best to take care of them.
- It's okay for them to feel upset.

Common Responses to Trauma Among Children:


Children age five and younger may:

- *Cling to parents or caregivers.*
- *Cry and be tearful.*
- *Have tantrums and be irritable.*
- *Complaining of physical problems such as stomach aches or headaches.*
- *Suddenly return to behaviors such as bed-wetting and thumb-sucking.*
- *Show increased fearfulness (for example, of the dark, monsters, or being alone).*
- *Incorporate aspects of the traumatic event into imaginary play.*

Children age six to 11 may:

- *Have problems in school.*
- *Isolate themselves from family and friends.*
- *Have nightmares, refuse to go to bed, or experience other sleep problems.*
- *Become irritable, angry, or disruptive.*
- *Be unable to concentrate.*
- *Complaining about physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches.*
- *Develop unfounded fears.*
- *Lose interest in fun activities.*

Adolescents age 12 to 17 may:

- *Have nightmares or other sleep problems.*
 - *Avoid reminders of the event.*
 - *Use or abuse drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.*
 - *Be disruptive or disrespectful or behave destructively.*
 - *Complaining about physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches.*
 - *Become isolated from friends and family.*
 - *Be angry or resentful.*
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Things you can do to help:

- Allow children to be sad or cry.
- Let children talk, write, or draw pictures about the event and their feelings.
- Limit viewing of repetitive news reports about traumatic events. Young children may not understand that news coverage is about one event and not multiple similar events.
- Give extra attention to children who have trouble sleeping. Let them sleep with a light on or let them sleep in your room (for a short time).
- Try to keep your usual routines
- Help children feel in control when possible
- Contact a health professional if, after a month in a safe environment, children are not able to perform their usual routines.
- Contact a health care provider if new behavioral or emotional problems develop, particularly if these symptoms occur for more than a few weeks:
 - Flashbacks (flashbacks are the mind reliving the event)
 - A racing heart and sweating
 - Being easily startled
 - Being emotionally numb
 - Being very sad or depressed



Things NOT to do:

- Expect children to be brave or tough.
- Make children discuss the event before they are ready.
- Get angry if children show strong emotion

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<http://rockcastle.kyschools.us/social-emotional-resources/>

<https://childmind.org/>