

Helping Children Cope with Violence/Disasters



According to a recent study by the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at least 1 in 4 children have directly witnessed a violent act within the past year. Additionally, rapid growth in technology

and social media are dramatically increasing the likelihood that kids will be exposed to tragic events, such as mass shootings and acts of terrorism. How kids respond to trauma can vary based on various factors, such as age, culture, preexisting mental health problems, availability of support and resources, and how they observe others respond to trauma.

What are some typical responses to trauma?

- ❖ Feeling fearful and anxious
- ❖ Flashbacks of the event
- ❖ Nightmares
- ❖ Difficulty sleeping
- ❖ Avoiding people or places that remind you of the event
- ❖ Constantly looking out for danger
- ❖ Feeling guilty, hopeless, or sad
- ❖ Difficulties with concentration
- ❖ Memory problems
- ❖ Feeling unsafe or mistrustful

Younger children may demonstrate additional signs including:

- ❖ Behavior problems
- ❖ Bedwetting or nighttime fears
- ❖ Stomach aches or headaches
- ❖ Difficulty separating from caregivers

Things to remember:

Responses to trauma can be immediate or occur much after the traumatic event.

Everyone responds differently to trauma, so allow your child to express himself or herself openly.

Younger kids may exhibit different reactions than older adolescents.

It is okay to not have all the answers and say "I don't know."

It's just as important for adults to take care of themselves and monitor their own response to traumatic events.

Most people will recover from trauma with time and may not require treatment.

How can parents help their children?

- ✓ Talk with your children about their worries and concerns to help them feel safe and begin to cope with the events occurring around them.
- ✓ Let them know you are interested in them and how they are coping with the information they are getting.
- ✓ Listen to their thoughts and point of view. Allow them to express their ideas and understanding before you respond.
- ✓ Validate their concerns and help them develop realistic plans for managing their safety in the future instead of providing too much reassurance like, “Everything will be okay.”
- ✓ Remind them you are there for them to provide safety, comfort and support but also respect their need for space.
- ✓ Limit exposure to news and social media when possible.
- ✓ Maintain normal schedules and routines as much as possible.
- ✓ Help kids feel “in control” by letting them make reasonable choices like what to eat or wear.
- ✓ Watch for signs of stress, fear, or anxiety, such as changes in mood or behavior, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite, withdrawal, or avoidance.

Who do I contact to find out more?

If you continue to have concerns regarding your child’s response to trauma, referrals for mental health services can be made by physicians, other health professionals, or by contacting a provider directly.



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