

After the Trauma: Helping My Child Cope

THINGS PARENTS CAN DO AND SAY



Six things you can do to help your child after a trauma.

- 1 Let your children know they are safe.** Younger children may need extra hugs (as well as your teens).
- 2 Allow children to talk about their feelings and worries if they want to.** Let them know that being a little scared and upset is normal. If they don't want to talk, they could write a story or draw a picture.
- 3 Go back to everyday routines.** Help your child get enough sleep, eat regularly, keep up with school, and spend time with friends.
- 4 Increase time with family and friends.** Children who get extra support from family and friends seem to do better after upsetting events. Try reading, playing sports or games or watching a movie together.
- 5 Take time to deal with your own feelings.** It will be harder to help your child if you are worried or upset. Talk about your feelings with other adults, such as family, friends, clergy, your doctor, or a counselor.
- 6 Keep in mind that people in the same family can react in different ways.** Remember, your child's feelings and worries might be different from yours. Brothers and sisters can feel upset too.

What should I expect after a trauma? In the first few days after a trauma, your child might feel confused, upset, jumpy or worried. This is normal. Most children just need a little extra time to feel better.

What are common changes in my child? After a trauma, changes you might notice are:

- 👉 **Young children:** thumb sucking, bed wetting, clinging to parents, being afraid of the dark.
- 👉 **School age children:** getting easily upset or angry, clinging to parents, nightmares, not paying attention, not wanting to go to school or play with friends.
- 👉 **Teens:** changes in sleeping and eating, new problems in school, arguing with friends or family, complaining of feeling sick.

When and how should I get help for my child? If these changes do not clear up, seem to be getting worse, or there are other things that worry you, talk to your child's doctor or school counselor to find out the best way to help your child and family.



Things other parents have found helpful.

YOUNGER CHILDREN:



"You're safe now."



"Why don't you draw a picture about your time in the hospital."

Do: Allow your child to talk about what happened, if he or she wants to.

Say: *"A lot has happened. Is there anything you're worried or confused about?"*

Do: If your child doesn't want to talk about what happened, encourage him or her to draw a picture or write a story about it.

Say: *(To younger children) "Can you draw a picture about what happened and tell me a story about it?" (To teenage children) "Can you write a story about what happened and how you're feeling?"*

Do: Keep in mind that brothers and sisters could also feel upset or worried.

Say: *"How are you doing? Is there anything you are worried about?"*

Do: Keep up with regular meal and bed times for you child. If sleep is a problem for your child, try a bedtime story and a favorite stuffed animal for younger children, some quiet time and relaxing music for teens.

Say: *(To younger children) "Let's read your favorite book before going to bed." (To teenage children) "How about listening to music that helps you relax?"*

Do: Talk to another adult if you are feeling upset about what happened to your child. Also, talk to your child's doctor if you are concerned about how he or she is dealing with the trauma.

Say: *"I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. It would help to have someone to talk to."*

OLDER CHILDREN:



"You can still spend time with your friends."



"When I'm upset, I find someone to talk to."



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