

# Healthcare Providers' Guide to Traumatic Stress in Ill or Injured Children

...AFTER THE ABCs, CONSIDER THE DEFs

D

## DISTRESS

- Assess and manage pain.
- Ask about fears and worries.
- Consider grief and loss.

E

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- Who and what does the patient need now?
- Barriers to mobilizing existing supports?

F

## FAMILY

- Assess parents' or siblings' and others' distress.
- Gauge family stressors and resources.
- Address other needs (beyond medical).

TRAUMATIC STRESS IN ILL OR INJURED CHILDREN

# QUICK GUIDE

*for Health Care Providers*

**For other helpful tools, please visit  
us at [www.healthcaretoolbox.org](http://www.healthcaretoolbox.org).**

 The Children's Hospital  
of Philadelphia®

CENTER FOR PEDIATRIC  
TRAUMATIC STRESS

A PARTNER IN  
NCTSN

 The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

# How to Assess: Distress

## TRAUMATIC STRESS IN ILL OR INJURED CHILDREN

---

### **Pain. Use your hospital's pediatric pain assessment. Ask:**

- How is your pain right now?
- What was your worst pain since this happened?

### **Fears and worries. Ask:**

- Sometimes, kids get upset when something like this happens.  
What has been scary or upsetting for you?
- What worries you the most?

### **Grief or loss. Ask:**

- Was anyone else hurt or ill?
- Have you had other recent losses? (home, pet, etc.)

# How to Help: Distress

TIPS TO HELP FAMILIES OF INJURED OR ILL CHILDREN

## **1 Provide child with as much control as possible.**

- Help the child understand what is happening.
- Allow the child to have a say in what will happen next.

## **2 Actively assess and treat the child's pain.**

- Use your hospital's pain management protocol.
- Teach child and parent basic coping techniques.

## **3 Provide accurate information, using basic words.**

- Ask the child to repeat back explanations.
- Listen carefully and clarify misconceptions.

## **4 Provide reassurance and realistic hope.**

- Describe what is being done to help the child feel better.
- Address the child's concerns or worries.

# How to Assess: Emotional Support

## TRAUMATIC STRESS IN ILL OR INJURED CHILDREN

---

### **What does the child need now?**

- Parents: What helps your child cope when upset/scared?
- Child: What helps you feel better when you are upset/scared?

### **Who is available to help the child?**

- Do parents understand the illness/injury or treatment?
- Can they be with their child during procedures?
- Can they help calm/soothe their child?

### **What are the barriers to mobilizing parent support?**

- Do parents' responses make it harder for them to help?
- How confident is the parent in caring for the child?



# How to Help: Emotional Support

TIPS TO HELP FAMILIES OF INJURED OR ILL CHILDREN

## **1 Listen to parents and encourage their presence.**

- Ask parents for their expertise about their child.
- Ask parents about their concerns.
- Encourage them to be with their child.

## **2 Empower parents to help their child.**

- Suggest ways they can help their child.
- Involve them in physical care, as appropriate.
- Help them seek out support if upset/anxious.

## **3 Encourage child/parent involvement in “normal” activities.**

- Suggest activities that fit the child’s medical status.
- Find activities that the child and parent can do together.
- Promote contact with the child’s friends and teachers.

# How to Assess: Family

## TRAUMATIC STRESS IN ILL OR INJURED CHILDREN

---

### **Assess distress of parents/family members. Ask:**

- How is your family coping right now?
- Who is having an especially difficult time?

### **Gauge family stressors and resources. Ask:**

- Are you eating, getting sleep, and taking breaks?
- Do you have friends who can help out at home?

### **Address other needs (beyond medical). Ask:**

- Are there other stressors going on (such as money, job, transportation) that make it particularly difficult right now?





# How to Help: Family

TIPS TO HELP FAMILIES OF INJURED OR ILL CHILDREN

## **1 Encourage parents' basic self-care.**

- Encourage parents to sleep, eat, and take breaks.
- Help them enlist support of friends, family, and community.

## **2 Remember other family members' needs.**

- Involve siblings and explain treatment to them when possible.
- Enlist hospital resources such as chaplain and social work as needed.

## **3 Be sensitive to the cultural and resource needs of the family.**

- Remember that outside issues can impact recovery.
- Be open to involving other healing professionals and customs.

# How to Assess: Culturally Sensitive Trauma-Informed Care

...QUESTIONS PROVIDERS SHOULD ASK

## LISTEN

...for variations in understanding. Ask:

- What is your understanding of what's happened?
- What is worrying you the most?
- What does your family think about it?

## BE OPEN

...to involving other professionals. Ask:

- Who do you normally turn to for support?
- Who else should be involved in helping your child?
- Are you open to outside referrals and resources?

## RESPECT

...different communication practices. Ask:

- Who typically makes the decisions about your child?
- What information should be shared with your child?
- Is there anyone else you would like me to talk to?

# How to Help: Culturally-Sensitive Trauma-Informed Care

...TIPS FOR PROVIDERS...

## **Families may attribute distress to culturally specific beliefs.**

- Consider somatic/behavioral presentations of distress.
- Listen for and use the family's own terms.
- Attend to distress in the way the family defines it.

## **Families may have distinct traditions for decision-making and communication.**

- Ask about decision-making practices in advance.
- Respect parents' wishes regarding what their child should know.
- Be open to involving other healing professionals and customs.

## **Families may be reluctant to seek help outside their cultural community.**

- Connect families with community resources they trust.
- Be sensitive to the family's fear about immigration and legal status.
- Show respect by working within and through the family structure.

# For the Provider: Working with Traumatized Children and Families

...ABCs OF PROVIDER SELF-CARE

## AWARENESS

- Be aware of how you react to stress (overworking, overeating, etc.).
- Monitor your stressors and set limits with patients and colleagues.
- Talk to a professional if your stress affects your life or relationships.

## BALANCE

- Diversify tasks and take breaks during the workday.
- Eat sensibly, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.
- Engage in activities outside of work; use your vacation days.

## CONNECTION

- Connect regularly with family, friends, and community.
- Use meditation, prayer, or relaxation to connect with yourself.
- When not at work, disconnect from professional role and e-mail.

# Working with Traumatized Children and Families

...WHAT PROVIDERS SHOULD KNOW...

## Stress can happen to all of us.

- Working with traumatized families impacts seasoned providers.
- Exposure to others' emotions and distress increases our stress.

## Unmanaged stress can take a toll on you and your patients.

- Years of work experience will not inoculate you from stress.
- Unmanaged stress accumulates and erodes health and well-being.

## Ill and injured children and families depend on your empathic engagement.

- In order to attend to your patients, you need to attend to yourself.
- Follow the same advice that you would give to your patients.

## ABC – Three things providers can do to manage stress:

Monitor your reactions and be aware of changes.

Maintain balance in personal and work lives.

Stay connected to loved ones and trusted colleagues.

...RED FLAGS...

- ✓ Changes in your beliefs or attitudes.
- ✓ Too much/too little engagement at work.
- ✓ Avoiding patients and co-workers.
- ✓ Decreased job/life satisfaction.