

Most children experiencing trauma will have some change in their behaviors and their emotional functioning. These children will often be more irritable, tired and regressed. Fortunately, however, for the majority of these children these symptoms are short-lived. Some children show no changes in their thinking, feeling or behaving.

Young children often make false assumptions about the causes of major events. The child may very easily distort an event and make the wrong conclusions about causality. In many of these distorted explanations, children assume some degree of responsibility for some element of the traumatic event. This can lead to very destructive and inappropriate feelings of guilt.

In general, the more threatened a child felt, the closer they were to injury or death, the more the event disrupted or traumatized their family or community, the more likely there will be symptoms. In some cases, children's symptoms do not show up for many weeks or even months after the traumatic event, confusing many parents. In these cases, parents may not even make a connection between the symptoms and the traumatic event.

The key to understanding traumatized children is to remember that they will often be in a state of low-level fear. When a traumatized child is in a state of alarm (because they are thinking about the trauma, for example) they will be less capable of concentrating, they will be more anxious and they will pay more attention to 'non-verbal' cues such as tone of voice, body posture and facial expressions. This has important implications for understanding the way the child is processing, learning and reacting in a given situation.

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Our mission is to promote family involvement by providing information on topics of interest in early childhood education to the parent as the child's first and most important teacher.

Help Your Child Cope With Trauma



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Helping Children Cope with Trauma

Some people wonder if they should encourage children to talk about the event or act it out in play, fearing that they will intensify or prolong the children's fears. Generally, this is not the case. The children are already thinking about it. Talking about it may relieve some of their anxieties and show them that they are not alone in their feelings. You may be able to clear up any misconceptions they have about the event.

As a parent, you can provide stability and routine. It's important to make children feel safe and create stability and routine in their lives as quickly as possible after the disaster.

It is **NORMAL** for children to re-enact the event through play with blocks and miniature dolls and cars. This makes children feel less helpless. Do not condemn them. This is how they express their feelings.

Share your feelings about the event. Be real. Talk about how you coped.

Think back to things that you were afraid of as a child. How did you respond to this you feared? In what way were your fears resolved?

Recognize that children's fears, no matter how silly or small, are very, very real and should be accepted not dismissed as trivial. As in all deeply felt emotions, children's fears need to be recognized, noticed, and accepted as real for that child.

Parents who display frequent fears and worries themselves, or who protect their child from all potentially risky experiences, will train their child to carry a larger number of fears than necessary. When facing a crisis, your first reaction is usually the worst. Panic will only prolong the stress reaction and does nothing to resolve the situation. If you panic, your child will probably become more upset.



Realize that your attitude about accepting challenges will determine your reaction. If you respond in a positive fashion, you provide an upbeat model for your child.

Model a "take charge" attitude so that you and your child come through the crisis healthier and stronger than before, but don't be afraid to also express your grief.

Let your child know the most important things in life are still intact. Research shows that as a child matures, his fears center on people and their actions more than anything else.

We cannot always prevent these experiences from happening, but it is essential that children be allowed to express their emotions without judgment. Empathy and an open, caring listener will help ease pain of these fears.

Read books and stories to your child about children who have experienced similar fears. This helps children to talk about their fears and to find ways to cope.

Recognize that healing takes time and that your child's symptoms of stress will probably disappear on its own when life gets back to normal. If they don't seek professional help.

As with all emotions, fears become less of a problem for children as they gain self-confidence, see their world as safe, and find that fear is normal and can be dealt with.

Resources:

www.childtrauma.org

Parts of this brochure are adapted from *Maltreated Children: Experience, Brain Development and The Next Generation*, by Dr. Bruce Perry