



Employee Assistance Program
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After Trauma: How to Help Your Child Cope

As a parent, you want to keep your child from harm. Yet, in spite of your best efforts, your child may have faced a traumatic event, such as a fire, an earthquake or a shooting.

Knowing that your child was in harm's way is upsetting. You want to comfort your child, yet you may not know how. The tips below are a starting point. Keep in mind that your child's age affects how he or she may react to trauma and the kind of help that is best to give.

Pre-school age (up to 4 years)

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, these reactions are common for pre-school age kids after trauma:

- Becoming clingy, quiet or upset
- Acting younger than their age (e.g., wetting the bed or sucking their thumb)
- Thinking the danger isn't over or is nearby
- Not understanding that death means someone is gone forever

How you can help

Consider these tips to help your child cope:

- At your child's eye level, calmly and clearly explain what happened and how your child may be affected.
- Give hugs and tell your child that you will be there to protect him or her.

- Let your child know that the danger is over and that you are far away from the danger.
- After a death, let your child say goodbye in his or her own way. (Make sure the child knows the death is not his or her fault.)
- If your child acts younger than his or her age, let it go. This behavior should pass.
- Keep your child away from media stories about the event.

School age (5–12 years)

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network says the following reactions are common for school age kids after trauma:

- Nightmares or trouble sleeping
- Being afraid to go to school or having trouble staying on task in school
- Feeling like he or she caused the event or that the event will happen again
- Being aggressive or sad
- Complaining about stomachaches, headaches or other physical problems

(continued)

How you can help

These tips can help your child cope:

- If your child asks about the event, give a clear explanation without the scary details.
- Remind your child that people are working hard to keep families like yours safe.
- Tell your child that the event was not his or her fault.
- Protect your child from media stories about the event.
- If your child complains about a physical problem (e.g., stomachache, headache), keep in mind that your child may be expressing worry that way. That being said, it's a good idea to take your child to the doctor just in case those aches and pains are more serious.
- Lower your expectations of how your child should be doing in school.

Teens (13–18 years)

The following reactions are common for teens after trauma:

- Saying they are not upset and not wanting to talk about their feelings
- Complaining of aches and pains
- Acting in a risky way (e.g., taking drugs or drinking)
- Having nightmares or flashbacks
- Feeling alone, hopeless, angry, or depressed
- Feeling guilty or wanting revenge
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Questioning religion

How you can help

These tips can help your teen cope:

- Limit television and Internet use.
- Share some of your own feelings with your teen.
- Tell your teen that your family is safe.
- Suggest to your teen that writing, art, music, or helping others can heal him or her.
- Lower your expectations of your teen's behavior at home and in school.
- Urge your teen to talk about his or her feelings with friends.

When to seek help

The reactions above are common after a traumatic event. If these behaviors go on for more than a month – or they appear later on – your child may need more help. Call your Employee Assistance Program if you are worried about your child.

Also, remember that taking care of yourself after a traumatic event is important too. By taking care of yourself, you will be better able to care for your child.

Need help?

**Call toll-free, 24 hours a day,
seven days a week:**

1-866-327-4762

TTY/TDD callers, please dial 1-800-327-0801.

Or visit us at:

eap4soc.mhn.com

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