

## WHAT IS TRAUMA?

- Trauma is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that leads to strong feelings of sadness, stress, or worry.
- Traumas can be natural disasters, like a hurricane or earthquake, or a typical life event, like sudden loss of a loved one. They can also be caused by other people. For example, as in sexual or physical abuse, a car accident, crime, or terrorist attack.
- Trauma is very common in childhood. In fact, most children experience a trauma before they turn 16.



## HOW DO CHILDREN RESPOND TO TRAUMA?

- Almost everyone is sad, anxious or angry after a trauma. For most people, these responses are normal and go away over time (1 – 2 weeks).
- In some cases, these thoughts and feelings don't go away on their own and may get in the way of everyday life, which can result in the child needing more help.

## SOME SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY NEED MORE SUPPORT

### INCLUDE:

- Worrying a lot or feeling very anxious, sad, or fearful
- Crying often
- Having trouble thinking clearly or concentrating
- Having scary thoughts about the trauma
- Feeling angry
- Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping since the trauma
- Avoiding places or people that remind them of the trauma
- Physical symptoms like headaches, stomach pain and digestive issues, feeling tired, racing heart and sweating, being very jumpy and easily startled

### RESOURCES

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml>

[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treatment/children/ptsd\\_in\\_children\\_and\\_adolescents\\_overview\\_for\\_professionals.as](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treatment/children/ptsd_in_children_and_adolescents_overview_for_professionals.as)

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types>

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## TIPS FOR PARENTS

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- **Don't be afraid to talk about the trauma.** Children do not benefit from 'putting it out of their minds.'
- **Talk about it in a calm manner.** If a child feels that her parents are upset about the event, she will not want to talk about it. This makes the child's recovery even more difficult.
- **Let the child lead the conversation.** Let your child ease into talking about the event at their own pace.
- **When the child brings it up or seems to be thinking about it,** don't avoid discussion. Listen to the child, answer questions, and provide comfort and support.
- **We often have no adequate explanations** about senseless death or traumatic events. In the end, just listening to and comforting your child will have long-lasting positive effects on your child's ability to cope with the traumatic event.
- **It's okay to let children see that you are sad or upset.** It helps them know emotions are normal.
- **Keep a routine going for the child that helps them feel safe.** Children feel safe with structure and routines.
- **Allow for the child to regain control that they may have lost after a traumatic event.** Parents can provide the child with choices on tasks, such as picking out their clothes for the day or their snacks.

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### When should I seek professional help?

- For children who continue to show signs of trauma for months afterward, they may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- It is important to seek professional help if you are worried your child might have PTSD.
- A therapist, such as a psychologist, social worker or counselor, can help your child understand and manage her moods and feelings.
- Effective treatments for PTSD include talk therapy (such as, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; TF-CBT) or a combination of talk therapy and medicine.
- Get immediate help. If your child expresses thoughts about wanting to kill themselves or is saying scary things, call 911 or bring your child to the emergency department.

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### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- *"The PTSD Workbook for Teens: Simple, Effective Skills for Healing Trauma"* by Libbi Palmer (2012)
- *"Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters: What Parents Can Do"* <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml>
- *National Child Traumatic Stress Network (guides for parents of children who have experienced trauma):* <https://www.nctsn.org/audiences/families-and-caregivers>
- *"How Little Coyote Found His Secret Strength: A Story About How to Get Through Hard Times"*, by Alicia Hu and Ching-Pang Kuo (2017)
- *A Terrible Thing Happened: A Story for Children who have Witnessed Violence or Trauma* by Margaret M. Holmes
- *Healing Days: A Guide for Kids Who have Experienced Trauma* by Susan Farber Straus, PhD