
Symptoms of Traumatic Stress

It is normal to feel stress during and after a scary or traumatic event. To some degree, the symptoms of traumatic stress that children show depends on their age. However, the following examples are some general signs that your child may be feeling the effects of traumatic stress. These symptoms are normal responses to trauma.

Change in typical behavior - such as a quiet child becoming loud, or an aggressive child becoming timid.

New behaviors - such as becoming superstitious, or hiding a lot.

Regression - Returning to behaviors that he or she had out-grown before the event such as bed-wetting, thumb sucking, carrying a blanket, whining and clinging,

Aggression - Hostility, destruction, verbal abuse, temper tantrums.

Weight Change - Noticeable gain or loss

Disorganization - Forgetfulness, difficulty following instructions, new problems with schoolwork, easily distracted.

Fearfulness - Nervousness, frequent nightmares, unable to be calmed.

Fatigue - Increased sleepiness, irritability, lack of energy or interest in things.

Extreme Helpfulness - Trying to make things better by being "good". Doing everything adults want.

Helping Children Cope With Traumatic Events

Information Guid

O-non-dowa-gah

Volunteer Fire Dept



A child you know has been exposed to an extremely stressful situation. We hope that this brochure will give you some helpful suggestions.

What you can do

The most important thing you can do for any child is to listen to what your child is telling you both directly (in words) and indirectly (through behavior). Understand that the symptoms you see are a normal response to the trauma. Notice how your child seems to be feeling. =, then tell your child in a clear way what you are noticing. For example, “You seem sad/scared/bored today.” Offer you child a way to cope with the feeling: “Would you like to sit on my lap?”

“...talk about what you’re afraid of?”
“...do something together?”

If you have experienced the trauma as well, it is important that you address your own symptoms in a healthy manner.

If the symptoms of traumatic stress persist for more than one month, it may be wise to seek professional help.

Preschoolers - Ages 2 - 5

- Recognize the symptoms of stress.
- Encourage your child to talk specifically about what may be worrying him/her.
- Remember that to children all fears are very real and not silly or funny.
- Provide lots of affection and emotional support.
- Tell your child that he/she is safe.
- Show your child things you do to protect her/him, like smoke detectors, door/window locks, seatbelts, etc.
- Be aware of your own feelings and stresses and cope with them.

School Age - Ages 6 -12

- Recognize the symptoms of stress.
- Support and understand your child’s feelings and behaviors.
- Listen to your child without giving advice. Reflect back to your child what you have heard him/her say.
- Set clear, realistic goals for everyday life and school.
- Encourage your child to talk about the event and his/her fears and feelings. Provide a solid “Home base”. Stick to routines. Be predictable.

- Give lots of appropriate approval and positive reinforcement.
- Work with her/his teacher to identify changes in behavior, and to keep expectations the same at home and school.

Adolescent - Ages 13 - 17

- Recognize the symptoms of stress.
- Support and assist your teen’s problem-solving skills.
- Limit criticism and increase support of her/his way of thinking and doing things (if healthy).
- Set aside specific time to listen; make an “appointment” if necessary.
- Encourage physical activity.
- Help him/her to keep a realistic schedule with time to relax and play.
- Work with your teen’s guidance counselor to identify changes in behavior, and to keep expectations the same at home and school.
- Provide emotional support and affection. Arrange for professional help if he/she wants it.