

Common Reactions by Children (Ages 2 ½ to 6) to Trauma and How a Parent Can Provide Support

Symptoms of Distress Following Trauma:

- Loss of new skills (caring for oneself – speech, bathing, grooming, making lunch, etc.).
- Magical explanations to fill in gaps in understanding.
- Complaints about bodily aches, pains or illness with no medical explanation.
- Visual images and unpleasant memories that will invade the child's mind (the child will rarely talk of this spontaneously).
- Behavioral, mood, or personality changes.
- Repetitive retelling of the event and/or fear of the trauma happening again.
- Separation anxiety from primary caregivers.
- Disruptions in sleep patterns; nightmares, sleepwalking, etc.
- Regressing to the behavior of a younger child (such as bedwetting).

How You Can Help:

- Provide chances for your child to feel in control. Let him/her make some decisions, etc.
- If your child is fearful, avoid separations from important caregivers unless it's unavoidable.

Courtesy of The Counseling Place counselingplace.org
469-283-0242

Modified from Children and Trauma: A Guide for Parents and Professionals by
Cynthia Mohahon. 1993.



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- Maintain routines that the family has established around eating and sleeping, other everyday household activities, and other routines that comfort the child.
- Be patient and listen to the child's retelling of the event. Listen for signs that the child might misunderstand the incident, especially when the misunderstanding involves self blame or magical thinking.
- Provide extra nighttime comforts when possible: stuffed animals, nightlights, and physical comforting after nightmares. Allow the child to try new ways to cope with fear at bedtime: extra reading time, leaving a light or radio on.
- Avoid exposing the child to things that will remind him/her of the trauma (movies/stories or physical locations that resemble the place where trauma occurred).
- Be open to seeking professional help for the child.

As parents, we can feel helpless and confused at times to know how to best support our kids through trauma. Here is a space for you to reflect and take notes.

Things I've noticed: _____

Things I've done to help: _____

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