

Helping Children After a Traumatic Experience: A Caregiver Guide



Children respond to traumatic events in different ways. This factsheet can help you understand some of the common responses children have to trauma, and how caregivers can help kids of all ages.

Common Reactions in Children

- Easily distracted or spacing out.
- Emotional outbursts including anger and aggression.
- Increase in clingy or needy behavior
- Sensitive to loud noises, jumpy or anxious.
- Physical complaints (stomach aches, headaches, change in appetite.)
- Being withdrawn, avoiding interactions.
- Lack of interest in normal activities.



- Children at this age look to adults for how to respond.
- Ask them how they are feeling.
- Talk to them about how you're feeling.

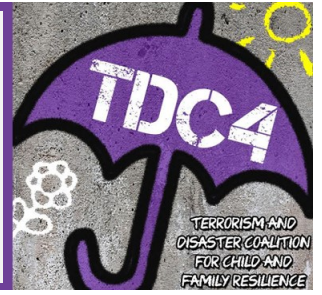


- It's okay to set limits on bad behavior – these limits might help them feel safe and secure.
- Routine is also really important – schedule and stick to a time for school, meals, bathing and bed.
- Show them affection through hugging and telling them you love them. Sometimes you just need to be there with them.
- Limit how much news and potentially violent television and movies they see.

- Give them time for play, both alone and with others.

Young Children

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- Talk with them about feelings – you may need to help them find words for what they are feeling. A word like ‘worry’ can be hard for children to understand.
- Listen to them and validate their feelings, but remember to set limits on aggressive or destructive behaviors.
- Work with them to find healthy ways to let out these feelings – like punching a pillow, tearing up paper, or drawing.
- Remember they might feel distracted – give them short tasks they can do to help improve their concentration.
- Be honest about how things might change, and give them time to talk about it.



School Aged Children

- Encourage teens to do soothing activities like reading, listening to music, or writing.
- Talk to them about their feelings and listen to their concerns. They might have worries you haven’t thought of.
- Set limits if their behaviors are aggressive or self-destructive.
- Allow them to spend extra time with close friends.
- Be patient, they may not be ready to talk about anything immediately.



Teens

- Show them affection in a way that’s comfortable for them.