

Suggestions to help children heal from trauma

Trauma is an emotional response to an intense event that threatens or causes harm, either physical or emotional. Trauma can occur as a result of a natural disaster (such as a tornado or flood), violence, or abuse. Seeing violence happen, even if you are not the victim, also may cause trauma.

Trauma can have a lasting effect on brain development in children. If not addressed, it can lead to trouble with school, relationships, or drugs and alcohol.

Try the following to help your child heal from trauma:

- ✓ Help your child feel safe. Stay calm and keep a regular routine for meals, play time, and bedtime. Prepare children in advance for any changes or new experiences.
- ✓ Encourage (don't force) children to talk about their feelings. Tell children it is normal to have many feelings after a trauma. Listen to their stories, take their reactions seriously, correct any misinformation about the traumatic event, and reassure them that what happened was not their fault.
- ✓ Provide extra attention, comfort, and encouragement. Spending time together as a family may help children feel safe. Younger children may want extra hugs or cuddling. Follow their lead and be patient if they seem needy.
- ✓ Teach children to relax. Encourage them to practice slow breathing, listen to calming music, or say positive things ("That was scary, but I'm safe now").
- ✓ Be aware of your own response to trauma. Parents' history of trauma and feelings about their child's experience can influence how they cope. Seek support if you need it.
- ✓ Remember that everyone heals differently from trauma. Respecting each child's own course of recovery is important.
- ✓ Find help when needed. If your child's problems last more than a few weeks, or if they get worse rather than better, ask for help. Find a mental health professional who knows proven strategies to help children cope with trauma.



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