


How to help kids cope

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The Scope of Trauma

- Each year in the US, approximately five million children experience some form of traumatic event. 2 million will suffer direct abuse. Many are exposed to domestic violence., natural disasters, car accidents, life-threatening medical conditions, painful procedures, or exposure to community violence
- By the time a child is 18, the probability that a child will have experienced interpersonal or community violence is approximately one in three. Traumatic experiences can have a devastating impact on the child, including negative impacts on their physical, emotional, cognitive and social development.



Signs and symptoms of traumatic stress

- **Emotional symptoms of traumatic stress include:**
- Shock and disbelief.
- Fear.
- Sadness or grief,
- Helplessness.
- Guilt
- Anger.
- Shame
- Relief
- **Physical symptoms include:**
- Feeling dizzy or faint, stomach tightening or churning, excessive sweating.
- Trembling, shaking
- Rapid breathing, pounding heart, even chest pains or difficulty breathing.
- Racing thoughts, being unable to rest or stop pacing, trouble concentrating
- Changes in your sleeping patterns.
- Unexplained aches and pains,
- Loss or increase in appetite, or excessive consumption of alcohol, nicotine, or drugs.

How to care for ourselves

- If you're feeling overwhelmed or traumatized by the event, try these resilience-building practices:
- [Mindful Breathing](#): Spend 15 minutes meditating while focusing on your breath.
- [Expressive Writing](#): Write continuously for 20 minutes about your deepest emotions and thoughts about the event, and how it relates to your past.

How to talk to children

- Break the news
- Take cues from your child (what do they know?)
- Model calm
- Be reassuring
- Help the child express their feelings
- Be developmentally appropriate
- Be available
- Create a memorial for those who have been lost

- When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.


(Mister Rogers)

Encourage kids to act

- Writing letters to victims and their families.
- Sending thank you notes to doctors, paramedics, firefighters, or police.
- Setting up a community study group to learn more about the issue.
- Organizing a town meeting to create an action plan.
- Writing a letter to the editor.
- Raising money for charity.

What makes something traumatic for a child?

- May be trouble sleeping, eating, irritability
- The effects of:
 - (1) child's history
 - (2) proximity to the event
 - (3) factors after the event



How to talk to kids about school shootings

- Unhealthy anxiety
- Look for ways to be proactive
- Talk to your children
- Active shooter drills

How trauma can affect kids in school

- Trouble forming relationships with teachers
- Poor self-regulation
- Negative thinking
- Hypervigilance
- Executive function challenges

How to recognize serious problems with grief

- an extended period of depression
- inability to sleep, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone
- acting much younger for an extended period
- excessively imitating the dead person
- believing they are talking to or seeing the deceased family member for an extended period of time
- repeated statements of wanting to join the dead person
- withdrawal from friends
- sharp drop in school performance or refusal to attend school

Recognizing trauma at different ages

Infants under age 2 may:

- Fuss more or be harder to soothe.
- Exhibit changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Appear withdrawn.

Children age 2 to 5 may:

- Show signs of fear.
- Cling to parent or caregiver more.
- Cry, scream, or whine.
- Move aimlessly or freeze up.
- Regress to earlier childhood behaviors, such as thumb sucking or bedwetting.

Children age 6 to 11 may:

- Lose interest in friends, family, or activities they used to enjoy.
- Experience [nightmares or other sleep problems](#).
- Become moody, disruptive, or angry.
- Struggle with school and homework.
- Complain of physical problems such as headaches or stomachaches.
- Develop unfounded fears.
- Feel depressed, emotionally numb, or guilty over what happened.

Adolescents age 12 to 17 may:

- Have flashbacks to the event, suffer from nightmares or other sleep problems.
- Avoid reminders of the event.
- Abuse alcohol, drugs, or nicotine products.
- Act disruptive, disrespectful, or aggressive.
- Complain of physical ailments.
- Feel isolated, guilty, or depressed.
- Lose interest in hobbies and interests.
- Have suicidal thoughts.

Helping kids cope after a death or trauma

- Realize that questions may persist.
- Encourage family discussions about the death of a loved one.
- Do not give children too much responsibility.
- Give special help to kids with special needs.
- Watch for signs of trauma.
- Know when to seek help.
- Take care of yourself.

Rebuilding trust and safety

- Make your child feel safe again. Hugging and reassuring can help make a child of any age feel secure.
- Encourage your child to pursue activities they enjoy. Try to make sure your child has space and time for rest, play, and fun.
- Maintain routines. Establishing a predictable structure and schedule
- Speak of the future and make plans. This can help counteract the common feeling among traumatized children that the future is scary, bleak, and unpredictable.
- Keep your promises. You can help to rebuild your child's trust by being trustworthy. Be consistent and follow through
- If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to admit it.
- Remember that children often personalize situations. They may worry about their own safety even if the traumatic event occurred far away. Reassure your child and help place the situation in context.

Minimize media exposure

Excessive exposure to images of a crisis or disturbing event—such as repeatedly viewing video clips on social media or news sites—can even create traumatic stress in children

- Limit your child's media exposure to the traumatic event. Don't let your child watch the news or [check social media](#) just before bed, and make use of parental controls on the TV, computer, and phone to prevent your child from repeatedly viewing disturbing footage.
- As much as you can, watch news reports of the traumatic event with your child.
- Avoid exposing your child to graphic images and videos.

What else can you do?

- Encourage physical activity
- Sleep
- Healthy diet
- Consider consulting with a professional

- <https://www.cstsonline.org/fact-sheet-menu/children-and-families>
- <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/helping-children-cope-with-traumatic-stress.htm>
- https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/nine_tips_for_talking_to_kids_about_trauma