

TIPS FOR PARENTS WITH OLDER CHILDREN AND/OR TEENS



Every year millions of children and teens experience traumatic or very upsetting events, many of whom will make a full physical and mental recovery.

After their trauma, you may see some changes in your child. There are a range of reactions to a traumatic event and not all children will be impacted in the same way. Even if they show some initial distress most will be fine in the long term.



What can traumatic stress reactions look like?

- Being more jumpy or on edge
- Having some bad memories of the event
- Having nightmares related to what happened
- Changes to eating or sleeping
- Complaints of headaches, sore stomachs or other minor illnesses
- Feeling more worried, scared or unsafe
- Wanting to stay away from reminders of the event
- Being more irritable or aggressive
- Trouble concentrating
- Taking more risks than before



How might these reactions impact on my child's behaviour?

Your child may:

- Start arguments with family or friends
- Not want to go to school
- Begin performing worse at school
- Not want to be around friends or family
- Not want to go back to previous activities



Will my child ever recover from this?

Some initial distress is common in some children and teens after a traumatic event. There is good research evidence to suggest that even if children and teens have shown initial signs of distress they will be fine in the long term. If your child or teen is not showing signs of improvement within a few months, or struggling to really cope with their reactions, you may need to seek help from your GP.

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD AND/OR TEEN COPE



1. It is okay to talk about what happened

Talking about what happened helps your teenager make sense of the event. It also helps place the memory in the past, which can be helpful for recovery. However, your teen may not be ready to talk about what happened to them for reasons that are important to them, so don't feel like you have to force it

In the meantime, it is still okay to ask your teen how they are feeling and give them the message that it is okay to talk with you if they want to.

2. You may not be the person your child/teen speaks to

This is also okay and quite common, so try not to be offended. Sometimes children or teens do not want to upset their parents by talking about their experience and therefore will choose not to. Make it clear to your teen that they can talk to you about what happened if they want to, this is good for them to know.

If your child is refusing to talk about what happened with anyone and you are worried about their distress levels then you may want to speak to your GP about this.

3. It is okay to both be upset after what happened

If your child or you become really distressed, emphasize that it is okay to feel upset but this does not mean they or you will feel this way forever. Try to stay together and talk until you are both feeling OK, rather than stopping or avoiding the conversation.

4. Resume normal activities

After their trauma it is good to resume normal activities where possible. Some parents may believe they are being kind by letting their children stay off school etc. However, resuming normal activities may be more helpful.

Try and encourage your child to reconnect with friends and spent time with them or other family members. This could be through inviting a small number of friends over to your house to spend time with your teen. Friends can be a helpful support structure for teenagers.



5. Work with your child to help them face their fears

There may be some things after the accident that your child does not want to do. If this happens try speaking to your child about this and find out why this is the case. Talk to your child about what they feel they are capable of, then use this to discuss how you can work together to conquer their fears. As they do begin to face their fears, ensure you give them lots of praise and rewards for doing so.