

# TIPS FOR PARENTS WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN



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 begin to 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?

- A loss in skills your child had before (e.g. toilet training)
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Loss of language skills or talk a lot less
- Feeling more worried, scared or unsafe
- Being more irritable or have more temper tantrums
- Bed wetting



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

Your child may:

- Be more aggressive with family members
- Trauma-focused play (e.g. banging two cars together to simulate a car crash)
- Not wanting to go anywhere alone
- Not wanting to be away from caregiver



## 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 have shown initial signs of distress they will be fine in the long term. If your child is not showing signs of improvement, or struggling to really cope with their reactions you may want to consider seeing a GP.

# WAYS TO HELP YOUR YOUNG CHILD COPE



## 1. It is okay for your child to have worries

Your child may have some new fears now or they may become more easily upset. Remind your child that it is okay to be upset or scared, but also talk them through their feelings. Remind them that their feelings are normal and it is okay to feel this way. Talking about what has happened helps put the memory in the past. Also remind your child that the world has not changed, that they are safe and that the trauma is over. This can be helpful for recovery.

## 2. Story telling or drawing may be a helpful way to talk about the trauma

Your child may not be ready to talk about what happened, so don't feel like you have to force it. Your child may also not want to talk about it with you, which is also okay. There could be a number of reasons important to them why your child does not want to talk about what happened with you. If this is the case, you could suggest your child write a story or draw a picture about what happened.

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. Re-enacting the event through play may not be a bad thing

Children may use this play as their own way of making sense of what happened. Trauma play may not be a sign that they are distressed. Watch if your child is becoming increasingly upset or distressed while playing. Asking them about their play may help you find out what they remember and help them make sense of the event.

## 4. Be patient with your child

As the result of their trauma, you may start to notice your child lose some skills they had previously learned such as toilet training. This may result in bed wetting or toilet accidents. Your child may also begin to be really clingy with you, or have more temper tantrums. These are common reactions to what has happened, but should go away naturally over time.



## 5. 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, getting back to normal life will give their child more chance in getting over their fears.

Remember, that it's not a good idea to pressure your child as they need to feel in control. Talk with your child about their goals making sure they feel they are manageable. As they begin to face their fears, ensure give them lots of praise and rewards for doing so.