

Helping Your Child Heal After Trauma

Parents do everything they can to protect their children. But sadly, many kids have gone through trauma.

A trauma is any event that is deeply upsetting, scary, or harmful. Things like abuse, violence, accidents, or natural disasters can be traumas. Becoming homeless, losing a parent, or a serious illness can be traumas too.

Traumas are serious events that cause kids to fear for their life or safety.

After a trauma, the emotional effects can last a long time. It can be hard to move on. For some kids, trauma can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

But kids can recover after trauma. There is therapy that can help. Kids also need **extra support and comfort from parents**.

How Does Trauma Affect Kids?

Trauma affects a child's **sense of safety and trust**. After a trauma, kids can still feel tense or scared. Some feel alone, sad, angry, or guilty. They may think they are to blame for what happened to them. For some kids, there's a loss of self-esteem or dignity. For some, there's deep grief.

Trauma also can affect a child's **mood, behavior, or sleep**. Some kids become depressed. They might act grumpy or seem sad. Some get in trouble more often, or do worse in school. Some have new fears, or trouble sleeping. Some have upsetting **memories**, called flashbacks. Often, kids **avoid things** that remind them of what they've been through.

After a trauma, some kids share how they feel. But other kids keep things to themselves. They may try to hide how they feel, or try to push it out of their minds. They may think others expect them to "get over it." Some just don't have words for their feelings. For any of these reasons, a parent might not know what their child is going through.

How Does Therapy Help Kids Heal After a Trauma?

Therapy gives kids a way to safely share their feelings, tell their story, and get support. In therapy, kids learn to talk about what they've been through. They learn coping and calming skills. They learn to adjust the way they think and feel about the trauma. Slowly, they learn to face things they used to avoid. Therapy helps kids find their own courage and gain confidence.

Child therapy for trauma is called **trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (or TF-CBT)**. Therapy includes talk, play, and learning activities that heal trauma.

TF-CBT helps parents too. It's natural for parents to feel upset about what their child has been through. In therapy, parents get the support they need. They get advice on how to help their child at home.

In TF-CBT, parents can play a big role in their child's healing. They are coached to listen in ways that help their child open up, talk, and feel close. They help their child practice coping skills at home. They share in the good feelings as their child makes progress.

How Can I Find Therapy for My Child?

Talk to your child's doctor. Let them know what your child has been through. Your child's doctor cares about your child's mental health too.

Ask your child's doctor to refer you to a trained child therapist who can help. You might need to take your child to therapy once a week for a few months. But you'll see progress along the way.

How Can I Give My Child the Extra Support They Need?

After a trauma, kids need your support and comfort more than ever. Be sure to:

- **Spend time with your child.** Do things that are soothing, relaxing, or fun. Cook together, take a walk, play, read, make art, or sing. Try to do this every day, even if it's only for a few minutes.
- **Parent with patience and warmth.** Use kind words. Give praise when your child is doing well or trying hard. Let your child know you're proud of them. Be patient when they make a mistake. Show them how to try again.
- **Show love.** Use hugs, smiles, words, and caring actions to show your love. Use soothing words and offer comfort when your child is upset.
- **Have soothing routines.** Take a few minutes at bedtime (or any time) to read a story, snuggle together, or sing to your young child. For older kids, make it a routine to give a good night hug, along with a few minutes to talk, listen, or laugh together. Those extra few minutes with you can help your child feel calm, safe, and relaxed.

These may seem like small things — things you already do. But giving extra support and time keeps your child feeling loved and close to you. After a trauma, that closeness matters more than ever.

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