



## Helping Children Cope with Traumatic Events

Children and teens are more vulnerable to being traumatized by the coronavirus pandemic, violent crime, or other disasters. But with the right parental support, they're also able to recover faster

### The effects of trauma on children and teens

Being involved in the COVID-19 pandemic, a serious accident, violent crime, terrorist attack, or natural disaster, such as an earthquake or hurricane, can be overwhelmingly stressful for children. A disaster, crisis, or other troubling event can cause traumatic stress, undermine your child's sense of security, and leave them feeling helpless and vulnerable—especially if the event stemmed from an act of violence, such as a mass shooting or terrorist attack. Even kids or teens not directly affected by a disaster can become traumatized when repeatedly exposed to horrific images of the event on the news or social media.

Whether your child lived through the disturbing event itself, witnessed it, or experienced traumatic stress in the aftermath, they're likely to be affected by an array of intense, confusing, and frightening emotions. While unpleasant symptoms may fade over time, there's plenty you can do as a parent or guardian to support and reassure a traumatized child. Using these coping tips, you can help your child manage symptoms of traumatic stress, rebuild their sense of safety, and move on from the traumatic event.

### Signs and symptoms of traumatic stress in kids and teens

Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to a natural or manmade disaster or other disturbing event. It can leave children of any age feeling overwhelmed by stress and trigger a wide range of intense emotions and physical or behavioral reactions. These in turn can affect your child's mood, appetite, sleep, and

overall well-being.

## Signs of Trauma in Kids and Teens

### 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- Appear withdrawn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 stomach aches
- 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**

Whatever the age of your child, it's important to offer extra reassurance and support following a traumatic event. With your love and guidance, the unsettling thoughts and feelings of traumatic stress can start to fade and your child's life can return to normal in the days or weeks following the crisis or disturbing event.

Click [here](#) to read [Helping your child cope with a disaster or traumatic event](#).

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