

Common Responses To Trauma

When children and youth experience something stressful or traumatic their bodies do everything in their power to protect them from the harmful effects of those experiences. These reactions can lead to more problems and added stress immediately or down the road. Trauma survivors may re-experience their trauma through thoughts, feelings, and memories (nightmares, flashbacks, and distressing thoughts).

Because these reminders of the trauma and stress are uncomfortable, it is not uncommon for survivors to try to avoid the negative feelings of sadness, fear, and anger that these reminders spark by avoiding anything that reminds them of the trauma and stress, including people, places, things, conversations, and thoughts. They may also turn to activities that numb or distract them from “bad feelings” such as social media, video gaming, substances, and unhealthy relationships.

Many children and youth find that they are “on edge” and are particularly jumpy, have difficulty concentrating, or sleeping.

You may be wondering how long all of this will last. For some, these responses to stress and trauma happen immediately and are over in a few days. For many, trauma responses slowly fade away after 2 weeks to a month. For others, there is a delay—and you might not observe any “significant” signs that they experienced something traumatic or stressful for months or years later.

There is no one right way to respond to a difficult circumstance, every person responds differently.

Thoughts

- Difficulty making decisions
- Ruminating on the event
- Loss of interest in normal activities
- Suspiciousness
- Nightmares
- Belief life won't get better
- Flashbacks
- Confusion
- Blaming
- Disorientation
- Trouble concentrating

Emotions

- Disbelief
- Anger
- Guilt
- Panic
- Aggression
- Irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Denial
- Shock
- Fear
- Anxiety about the future
- Numbness
- Sadness
- Feeling powerless

Spiritual

- Anger/blame towards God
- Feeling betrayed or abandoned by God
- Difficulty praying
- Loss of faith and hope
- Lose of sense of fairness
- Withdrawing from faith community

Relational

- Clinging to others
- Loss of trust
- Feeling guilty
- Isolating from others/detachment
- Restlessness
- Difficulty expressing yourself
- Easily frustrated
- Risky or impulsive behaviors

Physical

- Loss of appetite
- Heightened startle response
- Sleeping problems
- Stomach/neck/back pains
- Headaches
- Fidgety
- Chills
- Sweating
- Vomiting
- Heart palpitations
- Muscle tension
- Trouble catching your breath

How to help your child navigate traumatic and stressful experiences:

- 1. Routines are helpful:** Routines provide a sense of safety, security and stability.
- 2. Sleep:** Our brains need sleep to organize and heal from difficult circumstances.
- 3. Food, water and exercise:** For many people after a difficult situation it can be hard to remember to take care of your body. Help make sure your child is eating healthy, drinking plenty of water and moving their body—all of this will encourage their body to work on recovering from the stressful event.
- 4. Listen:** While your child may seem hesitant to talk about what they've experienced, give them opportunities to talk. You can do this both through directly initiating the conversation and also through just spending some quality time with them—going for walk, taking them grocery shopping, or playing a game.
- 5. Connect them with professional support:** If you feel like your child can use some extra support, connect them with a mental health professional. This doesn't mean they will need it for a long time.

Don't forget to take care of yourself.

As caring adults in the lives of youth, these stressful and traumatic events also can mess with our sense of safety and security. So remember, it's important to take care of yourself after you experience something traumatic or stressful too!



How to model healthy coping while taking care of yourself:

- Do something physical to get the blood flowing.
- Avoid sugar, coffee, fried foods, alcohol, and drink more water than usual.
- Talk about your feelings, thoughts, frustrations, with others.
- Develop and try to keep a routine.
- Avoid over use of medications, drugs, cigarettes, and other substances.
- Don't make any major decisions or changes. Give yourself time to get back in the right frame of mind.
- Eat lighter, healthier meals and eat smaller portions but more often than normal.
- Find some paper or a journal and write whatever comes to mind, especially right before you lay down to rest.
- Reach out for help and graciously receive those who offer help.
- **Realize that you are not alone.** Others are going through similar issues with you.
- Rest, even if you can't sleep. Rest your bones.

We Are Here to Help You



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