



What a Parent Needs to Know

Your child can be traumatized in the same way as an adult.

Your child experiences reactions similar to traumatized adults.

Post traumatic stress creates reactions that are in addition to and different from grief.

Your child does not need to be a victim or a witness but only related to a friend or peer to be traumatized themselves.

Violence is not the only kind of incident that can induce trauma in your child.

Car accidents, house fires, serious surgical procedures, terminal illness of a loved one, drowning accident, finding a body, divorce, separation from a parent, plane crashes, floods, hurricanes can all induce trauma in a child.

A family trauma such as a murder of a family member can traumatize the entire family.

Each member of a family will have his/her own individual reactions.

Reactions may be more intense for some and less for others. The longer trauma victims go without trauma specific help the more chronic and severe the reactions can become.

Trauma reactions cannot be prevented, but their negative impact on your child's learning, behavior, personality and emotional development can be minimized when help is provided as soon as possible.

Your child, when given an opportunity, will generally be eager and able to face the details of his trauma.

Trauma specific help can assist your child in finding relief from his terror as well as regaining a sense of control and power over the "monsters" their experience created.

Your child, when taken for trauma specific help, will be forever grateful to you, for acknowledging his need to talk with someone who understands what his terror is like.

A traumatized child desperately needs your patience, the feeling of safety, security and basic nurturing.

As a parent you, too will need information about ways trauma changes your child, and how you can best assist his recovery.



When Should I Be Concerned? Terror On Top of Grief • Trauma Reactions in Children

Trauma reactions are different from grief reactions. Only recently has it been verified that children are vulnerable to experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a disorder once attributed to only adult survivors of war. These reactions appear in children following disasters, acts of violence, sudden unanticipated death, critical injuries, car fatalities, house fires, drownings and sudden unexpected incidents involving family or friends.

The one word that best describes grief is sadness; the one word that best describes trauma is terror. Terror induces reactions not often seen in children who are grieving. You should be concerned when your child has:

- trouble sleeping, afraid to sleep alone or be left alone even for short periods of time,
- is easily startled (terrorized) by sounds, sights, smells similar to those that existed at the time of the event - a car backfiring may sound like the gun shot that killed someone; for one child, his dog pouncing down the stairs brought back the sound of his father falling down the stairs and dying,
- becomes hypervigilant - forever watching out for and anticipating that they are about to be or are in danger,
- seeks safety "spots" in their environment, in whatever room they may be in at the time. Children who sleep on the floor instead of in their bed after a trauma do so because they fear the comfort of a bed will let them sleep so hard they won't hear the danger coming,
- becomes irritable, aggressive, acting tough, provoking fights,
- verbalizes a desire for revenge,
- acts as if they are no longer afraid of anything or anyone, and in the face of danger, responding inappropriately, verbalizing that nothing ever scares them anymore,
- forgets recently acquired skills,
- returns to behaviors they had previously stopped i.e. bed wetting, nail biting, or developing disturbing behaviors such as stuttering,
- withdraws and wants less to do with their friends,,
- develops headaches, stomach problems, fatigue, and other ailments not previously present,
- becomes accident prone, taking risks they had previously avoided, putting themselves in life threatening situations, reenacting the event as a victim or a hero,
- develops school problems including a drop in grades and difficulty concentrating, or
- develops a pessimistic view of the future, losing their resilience to overcome additional difficulties, losing hope, losing their passion to survive, play and enjoy life.

While these changes are not unusual, they often go unnoticed or fail to bring a helping response from adults. These changes can and do become permanent when the child does not receive appropriate help. Often children suffer silently for years with their terror until one or several of these changes become so intense and problematic that someone says something. Unfortunately, years later few people are likely to associate these reactions to the child's earlier trauma. The help given often misses the mark. This further increases the child's sense of helplessness and failure.



Ways to Help Your Child and Help Yourself At the Same Time

Understand

- 1) Trauma is like no other experience. It brings out reactions you may have never seen before, nor your child has ever experienced.
- 2) Your child may not have control over his behavior because the terror he experienced has left him feeling out of control. It may be that terror which is driving his behaviors.
- 3) As long as a child's behavior is not hurting others or himself, it is okay.
- 4) If your child's behavior is upsetting to you, it is best to talk with a trauma specialist before reacting because these behaviors need special intervention.

Be Patient

- 1) Trauma destroys a child's sense of safety and security. He will need time to feel safe again and to feel that you can protect him.
- 2) As a parent of a traumatized child, it will be very difficult to see your child return to behaviors he engaged in years earlier, to see him act entirely different than the child you knew him to be before the trauma. He needs you to be patient.
- 3) Whatever behaviors he turns to after the trauma, no matter how strange or frightening they are for you, it is your child's attempt to feel powerful and safe again. Be patient. Do not push them to change or to stop until you have consulted a trauma specialist.

Be Nurturing

- 1) Whatever the age, any trauma needs to be followed by a lot of nurturing.
- 2) Let your child eat whatever he wants, follow you around or even withdraw for a while. Your child may want to be taken care of, to have fewer demands.
- 3) Spend more time with your child the first several weeks.

Keep It Simple

- 1) A terrorized child, adolescent, or adult will find it difficult to concentrate and remember even the simplest of things.
- 2) A terrorized individual will be forgetful. He can even forget what he was doing or talking about five minutes earlier.
- 3) You need to simplify everything for several weeks. Do not expect more. Do not introduce new challenges. This is a time to protect your child from stress. It really needs to be an, "all the cookies and milk I want," time for traumatized children.

Normalize

- 1) Reinforce that you understand that his reactions are not unusual following his experience.
- 2) Learn what trauma reactions can be expected and let your child know what he may yet experience.

