

Common Reactions to Trauma

Not all people will have the same experience or reactions to trauma. Some people do well by talking to family members or friends and remembering to take care of themselves. Others may not be able to focus on what they need or may not know how to get their needs met. Following is information that may be helpful for you or that you can share with others who have experienced a trauma. Since children often react differently than adults, we have included a separate category.

People may Experience

- Anger
- Guilt
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Fear
- Disorientation
- Interruptions in sleeping patterns
- Changes in eating habits

Things that help people:

- Support system (i.e., family, friends, co-workers)
- Feeling safe
- Routine
- Encouragement
- Activity
- Exercise
- Focus on positive

Ways to meet these needs:

- Talking to
 - family members and friends
 - co-workers
 - trauma specialists
 - counselors
 - spiritual or religious leaders
- Planning daily routine
- At least one hot meal a day
- Reduce caffeine and sugar intake
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Nap for short periods during the day
- At least 7-8 hours of sleep a night

Children's Reactions

Children of all ages including teenagers may experience the same feelings, as adults; however they may express these reactions differently. For example, a child may ask probing questions about the trauma and run off to play before the adult has time to reply. Teenagers are prone to feel ashamed over losses that are beyond their control due to peer pressure and the normal developmental issues associated with adolescence. Teens may tend to spend more

time with their peers as a way of coping with their feelings, whereas small children may become more dependent on parents and caregivers.

Whereas some children and adolescents may not exhibit anything unusual immediately following the trauma, they may manifest responses to the trauma at a later date. It is important to note that some children and adults may never experience problems from the trauma. It is also important to be aware of the information listed below in case there is a need for additional services or support.

Children May Experience:

- Observable Behaviors
 - Anxiety
 - Weeping
 - Mood Swings
 - Restlessness
 - Unexplained fears
 - Unrealistic fears
 - Unusual dependency on adults
 - ◆ Not wanting to go to school, church, shopping, friend's house, etc.
 - ◆ Don't want to be alone in a room
 - ◆ "Clinginess"
 - Sleep problems
 - Trouble falling asleep
 - Inability to sleep
 - Sleeping too much
 - Interrupted sleep
 - Bad dreams
 - Nightmares
 - Impulsiveness
 - Stealing
 - Hitting
 - Biting
 - Fighting with others
 - Regression
 - Thumb sucking
 - Bed-wetting
 - Stuttering
 - "Baby talk"
 - Re-enactment of trauma
 - Acting out or drawing "scenes" of trauma
 - Avoiding Behaviors
 - Withdrawing from normal activities and hobbies
 - Daydreaming
 - Avoiding other children and people
 - Avoiding people who were also involved in trauma

Things that Help:

- Time to play
- To express their feelings without being judged
- To be able to talk about their feelings and experience with someone who is able to listen and not pressure the child to discuss details they are not ready to share.
- To hear that adults are coping and have a plan of action
- To return to normalcy in their routine as quickly as possible
- Hugs & kisses and to know they are loved
- To hear adults discuss expectations for behavior and 'discipline' with the child. Utilize positive reinforcement and rewards. Avoid physical discipline.
- To be given "choices" and a sense of control over their environment

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