

Steps to Helping Kids Cope with Trauma

1. Reassure the child. Communicate to them that they are safe and that everything will be alright.
2. Express your love to the child. Let them know you are there to comfort them.
3. Praise the child when they obey and are responsible.
4. Spend time with the child. Give them the extra attention they may need.
5. Don't expect the child to handle the situation "as an adult". Allow room for immaturity.
6. Be honest. Children can tell when they are being lied to.
7. Stick to a routine schedule, but remember to allow room for fun.
8. Give them an opportunity to share their feelings. Listen to them and respond with reassuring, simple answers.
9. Encourage creativity. Many children will express their feelings about the trauma by acting the scenario out with toys or by drawing pictures.
10. Don't hide your feelings. Let the child know it is ok to cry.
11. Take out time to cope with your own feelings about the trauma. Release this stress and tension before speaking with your child.
12. Give hugs. Use this form of touch and comfort to reassure the child of your presence.
13. Pay attention to any media the child is exposed to. News coverage of a disaster or images related to a traumatic experience can negatively affect a child.
14. Provide them with opportunities to help others. This gives the child a feeling that they are doing something about the experience and also relieves tension.
15. If necessary, seek trauma therapy or special trauma treatment for the child.

Responses to Trauma

Children cope with trauma in a variety of different ways. The following are common reactions each age group may have to trauma.

Babies/Children Younger Than 2 Years of Age –

- Eager to be held
- Unable to eat
- Delayed growth
- Responsive to specific sights, smells and sounds
- Frequent crying
- Disturbed sleep

Preschool Aged Children –

- Vulnerability
- Unable to eat
- Thumb sucking
- Reenacting the situation with various objects
- Bedwetting
- Fear of the dark
- Does not enjoy previous activities, social avoidance
- Fear
- Unable to sleep
- Attached to parent or guardian, fear of loss

Elementary School Aged Children –

- Poor academic performance
- Sad feelings
- Nightmares
- Attached to parent or guardian, clingy
- Talkative (especially of the traumatic event)
- Fearful
- Feelings of guilt
- Hostility/anger

Adolescents/Children Out of Elementary School –

- Engaging in reckless behavior
- Lack of an appetite
- Difficulty expressing themselves
- Fear
- Avoidance of social interaction
- Overwhelming feelings
- Inability to concentrate, poor performance in school
- Thoughts of death
- Taking drugs, excessive drinking