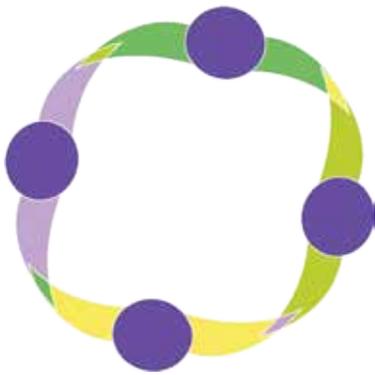


What to do in the Aftermath of Trauma

Parents and/or grown-ups can make all the difference in a child's recovery from trauma. A child will be traumatised when exposed to trauma but if children are given the proper support, they can process the trauma much more quickly and therefore – bounce back more easily.

Because a child's recovery is so dependent on the reaction of the grown-ups in their world, it creates a lot of pressure to do the right thing.

1. Family ...



The most important need a child has is to stay with the FAMILY if at all possible as unfortunately being sent elsewhere can sometimes further traumatise children.

Children often feel abandoned during this type of separation. They may interpret being sent away to mean they were bad and are being punished. Also, children often imagine the worst if they can't see the parents and be reassured by their presence. They worry they may never see their parents again or that the trauma could reoccur and they would be alone and unable to find them. Separation from parents, under the best of circumstances, is difficult for children. Under traumatic circumstances, it can be terrifying.

2. Routine ...

The second important need a child has is routine. Trauma equals chaos. Routine equals order. Organise the child's post-trauma experience by introducing order as soon as possible. This can be done in simple ways:

- Regulate bedtimes
- Regulate mealtime
- Assign age-appropriate chores
- Return the child to school as soon as possible
- Create a special time of day (15 mins is enough) just for you and the child to; read, talk, play, hold
- Be consistent. Consistency is a mainstay for children. They feel safe if they know they can rely on their world remaining the same.



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3. Information ...

The third most important need a child has is to be given information. Many times adults worry that children are better off not knowing but it does help them to know. Give age-specific information and tell them what the plan is for taking care of the trauma. This may include:

- Plans to clean up and rebuild your's and your children's lives
- Plans for the whole family to go for medical and or psychological treatment
- Plans for future prevention of such incidences occurring again

Talk to them about how people feel after a trauma, including your feelings and his or hers. The rule of thumb is, don't keep a child in the dark. It will only frighten them further.



4. Guidance & Reassurance ...

The fourth important need a child has is for you to be in control, to guide and to reassure. If you are showing signs of stress, so will a child. This does not mean that you should not deny you are upset, it means not to overburden them your worries and stresses.

A child's greatest fears will be that the trauma will happen again and if it does, it will result in separation and abandonment. Reassure them that you will all stay together, that it is unlikely another trauma will occur and that the family is going to prepare for any future occurrence.

Guidance is reassurance in the form of information.



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5. Talking ...



The fifth important need a child has is to talk. In order to talk, they will need to sense that you can and will listen and they will need to know you will listen with sensitivity and without judgement.

- Little children may 'talk' by showing you through play or behaviour. This kind of talk is harder to listen to, but not impossible. For instance, if children are fretful, they are telling you they need something more, perhaps reassurance, perhaps just being held.
- If you have more than one child, each child may be trying to express himself differently. Listen to them talking to each other and watch their play. There are many clues about that they have to say about the trauma in their conversations with each other and in their play.
- Invite talking about the trauma. You could open up by saying "I was think about (the accident or the bad man who hurt you or the flood) a minute ago. I wonder if you think about it too?"
- Set aside a special time for talking and think of including the whole family. When one person can talk about his or her feelings, it helps others to talk.
- Many children talk through drawing. You may want to introduce this by having available drawing materials and then talking with them about what they have drawn.

A few more titbits ...

If you have little children, you may need to prepare yourself to allow your child some regression. For instance, if your child wants a bottle after not having one for a year, give it to your child. Allowing regression however does not mean becoming inconsistent, so if you are going to allow the bottle, do it consistently and remember to maintain rule around other routines. Most children will give up the regressive behaviour on their own.

If children are big enough to help, involve them in post-trauma activities. It will help them feel in control and feel useful. Most teens will feel great about pitching in and helping. Try to keep your teens in whatever activities they were engaged in prior to the trauma.

Remind a child of any age that it is normal to feel scared, disrupted and confused following a trauma. It will help them to know that you feel that way too.

