

How Children Can Be Helped

Encouragement and reassurance ...



Helping Children ...

The effects on individual children are not irreversible if early and effective intervention occurs. Greater awareness has resulted in increased research on and counselling services for children who have or are suffering the trauma of domestic violence.

Individual and group work with children who have witnessed or experienced violence (once they are safe from violent situations) generally involves addressing the following issues:

- Realisation of and reinforcing that they are not alone
- Encouraging the identification, discussion and constructive expression of painful feelings; such as anger, fear and guilt.
- Promoting the understanding that family violence is an adult problem, and that it is not their fault or responsibility
- Learning that violence is unacceptable behaviour. Presentation of alternatives to violence.
- Development of positive images of men and women, and learning what equality is in relationships.
- Providing the opportunity to connect with positive male role models
- Teaching non-violent problem solving techniques
- Dealing with their ambivalence and self-blame
- Recognition of their rights and responsibilities
- Providing experiences for the development of healthy self-esteem
- Encouraging and supporting the grieving over losses that result from leaving home, pets, friends, school and the trust and security they have yearned for and which their father has not provided.
- Assistance to deal with powerful mixed and confused feelings towards their father.



What Kids Need ...

Some guidelines for helping children grow up healthy and strong:

1. Correction, appropriately expressed, is not destructive, hurtful or shame inducing.
2. One's needs cannot always be met by others, but they can always be appropriately articulated to others.
3. Feelings do not need justification – one always has a right to one's feelings.
4. One does not always have the right to act on one's feelings; all actions have consequences and these need to be thought about.
5. Compromise means giving up as well as getting.
6. Changing one's mind is not necessarily a bad thing; part of growing up is the ability to react based on new information.
7. Making mistakes is often how we learn. There is no shame involved.
8. Being able to 'own' our mistakes, apologise is appropriate and make amends where possible is how we grown. "I'm sorry; tell me what I can do to make it up to you" is a statement of strength, not an admissions of weakness or shame.

If children are fortunate enough to grow up in a home where these eight rules are acted out in the course of daily events, they will probably be healthy, secure adults with positive self-images. They will probably be comfortable with their feelings and have little difficulty with setting reasonable boundaries in their lives.

Credit: interpreted from The Narcissistic Family: Diagnosis and Treatment, by Stephanie Donaldson-Pressman

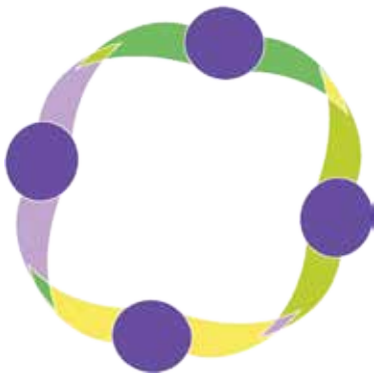


What to do in the Aftermath of Trauma

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.



What to do in the Aftermath of Trauma

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.



What to do in the Aftermath of Trauma

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.



Positive Feelings

Children experience powerful mixed and confusing feelings that may be difficult for them to articulate. Counselling is a safe place for young people to express and come to terms with their thoughts and feelings. Learning how to talk to your child/ren about such issues can not only help the post-trauma healing process, it can create a powerful bond between you.

The following is a list of some thoughts and feelings children may experience, and how you can recognise, encourage and/or talk about such experiences.



"I feel important when"

- I get a special treat
- I am told I'm special
- I learn something new
- I get praise
- I can help someone



"When I feel excited"

- I tingle all over
- I want to jump or sing
- I want to tell everyone



"I feel happy when"

- I listen to a favourite bedtime story or song
- Our family has a special outing / evening / occasion
- It's my birthday
- Mum and Dad spend some time with me
- I can choose a program on TV or Video



"I feel safe when"

- I am in a safe place
- I talk to someone I trust
- Grown ups listen when I talk
- Friends and family act as if they like me

Feeling Faces



Difficult Feelings



"When I feel sad"

- I feel heavy inside
- It helps to write down or draw how I feel
- It can help if I talk to a friend
- It helps if someone tells me it's okay to cry
- It helps if someone tells me it's okay to make mistakes



"When I feel confused or lonely"

- I feel mixed up or empty inside
- It helps to talk to myself or my dog or cat
- It helps if I talk with someone who understands
- it helps to cuddle my teddy/doll/toy/blanket



"When I feel Scared"

- I get butterflies in my stomach or my heart beats fast
- It helps to talk to someone I trust
- It helps if I can go to a safe place



"When I feel worried"

- I feel tight inside
- It helps to write down what I am worried about
- It helps to talk with family or friends
- It helps if grown ups help me work out what to do



"When I feel Cranky"

- I feel I want to cry and shout
- it helps I can tell someone
- I feel I can't sit still
- sometimes it helps if someone gives me a drink or something to eat or a hug
- At other times it helps if I can have quiet time alone. If I'm bored it helps if I am given ideas for things to do



"When I feel Angry"

- I feel hot all over
- I feel like hitting something
- It helps to hit my pillow or kick a ball
- It helps to listen to music or draw a picture of what makes me angry
- It help to know it's okay to feel angry
- It help to tell why I am angry

Feeling Faces

