



What Can I Do to Help My Child?

You are valuable and a key factor in your child's healing process. After a traumatic event, you can:

- Help your child to feel **safe, secure, and loved**
- Help your child to **return to typical routines** as much as possible (e.g., sleep, preschool, being with friends)
- If your child is verbal, **talk with your child** about their thoughts and feelings and read children's books about feelings with your child
- **Be patient and accepting** of your child's reactions, but keep enforcing household rules
- **Reassure your child and yourself** that the traumatic event was not their fault
- If concerned, **have your child assessed** by a mental health professional trained in trauma-focused treatment or other trauma-focused services

Additional Resources



Dial 211 for free referral assistance to get information, referrals or help during a crisis.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers>

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<https://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/recovery-support-tools/parents-families>

Zero to Three

<https://www.zerotothree.org/issue-areas/trauma/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness

<https://www.nami.org>



A PROGRAM OF
CHDI Child Health and
Development Institute

A PARTNER IN
NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network



WHAT FAMILIES OF
YOUNG CHILDREN NEED
TO KNOW ABOUT

Trauma Screening

What are Traumatic Events?

Traumatic events are difficult or stressful things that can happen to a child or to someone they love or depend on for care. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, the most common forms of trauma and adversity experienced by young children include:



Accidents



Neglect



Physical trauma



Exposure to domestic or community violence



Abuse

Young children can also experience other forms of adversity, such as racism, discrimination, loss of a loved one, or homelessness.

What are the Effects of Traumatic Events?

Children can experience traumatic events in very different ways. An event that is very traumatic or upsetting for one child may not be as traumatic or upsetting for another child. Some of the ways that young children may respond to traumatic events include:



Inattention or difficulties focusing in school, child care, or other settings



Fearing separation from a caregiver



Learning difficulties



Physical problems, such as stomachaches or headaches



Age-inappropriate behaviors



Wetting the bed or themselves following toilet training



Aggressive behaviors



Sleep problems, such as nightmares or poor sleep habits



Being easily startled

There are big differences in the way young children develop, and many of these behaviors are common even for children who haven't experienced trauma. To help identify whether a child's behavior may be related to traumatic events, identify the severity of the behaviors and whether there have been changes or new concerns following a traumatic event. In addition, most young children have some of these reactions for a short time after they experience a traumatic event – this is also common and understandable. Many children start to feel better within a few weeks. However, even with support from family and friends, a child could continue to struggle with trauma reactions, sometimes for many years.

What is a Trauma Screen?



Nobody likes to think about bad things happening to very young children and many assume that young children won't be affected if they can't remember it or talk about it. But young children are impacted and early identification could help and prevent problems later on. Screening identifies what types of traumatic events a young child might have experienced and possible effects on the child. Often, people don't talk about these events or effects unless they are asked. If concerns are identified, families can be offered connections with mental health, community, and other resources.

During the trauma screen, you may be asked about:

- Whether your child experienced events that may have been traumatic
- Whether your child is experiencing effects related to the traumatic events
- How your child is progressing on their developmental milestones (especially for very young children)

With support from caregivers and the community, young children and families can recover. Without support, healing from trauma exposure may be more difficult. Screening for traumatic events and potential trauma-related problems can show you how to help your child and decide whether talking to a professional with experience in treating trauma-related problems would be helpful.



What Will Happen After Trauma Screening?

- The results of trauma screening and recommendations will be shared with you.
- If the results suggest your child may be having difficulties because of continuing reactions to traumatic events, you are not alone. There are things you can do, and effective treatments and services that can help.
- If the results suggest that trauma-focused services could help your child, you will receive recommendations for who can provide these services in your community. You can choose how you would like to move forward.
- The people providing trauma-focused services should include you in every step of the way. They should discuss your child's reactions and care with you. They should work with you so that you can help your child and family heal.

