

Supporting Children and Teens After a Traumatic Event

Over the course of the last few years, reports of traumatic events, such as mass violence, war, and natural disasters have plagued the news. It's normal for children and teens to feel a range of emotions such as sadness, worry, anger, helplessness, and anxiety. The following recommendations from the [American Counseling Association \(ACA\)](#) and the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) can help parents and caregivers support young ones in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

Start the conversation

Don't avoid the topic. With access to TV and social media, it's likely your child has already heard about the news. Instead, start a conversation with your child and ask what they know about the incident. Listen for inaccurate information and gently correct their misconceptions using clear language that is age-appropriate.

Encourage your child to ask questions

Your child or teen may have some complicated questions about the incident and may ask if it's possible such an event could happen to them. The concern about recurrence will be an issue for children and caregivers alike. While it is important to discuss the likelihood of this risk, your child is also seeking confirmation that they are safe.

Avoid overexposure to media

Children are better able to cope with a difficult situation when they have the facts about it. Instead of relying on upsetting media coverage, be their go-to with information on the support the survivors are receiving. Remember, even adults can become more distressed when regularly exposed to media coverage of traumatic events. Consider the need to reduce your own exposure, as well.

Talk with other people in your child's life

It's common for young people to feel anxious about what has happened in the past, what may happen in the future, and how such events will affect their lives. Check in with other adults your child trusts and shares feelings with: caregivers, friends' parents, teachers, coaches. Ask them if they've noticed anything different.

Try to recognize when children may need extra support

It is not uncommon for children to experience stress reactions when exposed to traumatic events, even second-hand. Be patient, as children and teens may have difficulty concentrating, become irritable or defiant, or display changes in their appetite or sleep routines. Children in particular might want to stay at home, and cling close to loved ones.

Consult with a professional

Don't hesitate to talk with a mental health expert who can assess what might be going on and offer options to help your child or teen feel better. Therapy will likely be a collaborative process with you, your child, and the therapist.