Traumatic Stress Symptoms in Children

The signs of traumatic stress are different in each child. Young children react differently than older children. Some common signs of traumatic stress can be:

### Preschool Children
- Feel helpless & uncertain
- Fear of being separated from parent/caregiver
- Cry and/or scream a lot
- Sleep poorly & lose weight
- Return to bedwetting
- Return to using baby talk
- Develop new fears
- Have nightmares
- Recreate the trauma through play
- Not developing to next growth stage
- Have changes in behavior
- Ask questions about death

### Elementary School Children
- Become anxious & fearful
- Worry about their own or other’s safety
- Become clingy with teacher or parent
- Feel guilt or shame
- Tell others about the traumatic event again and again
- Become upset if they get a small bump or bruise
- Have a hard time concentrating
- Experience numbness
- Worry that the event will happen again
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Show changes in school performance
- Become easily startled

### Middle School Children
- Feel depressed & alone
- Discuss the traumatic events in detail
- Develop eating disorders and self-harming behaviors like cutting
- Start using or abusing alcohol/drugs
- Become sexually active
- Feel like they’re going crazy
- Take too many risks
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Don’t want to go to places that remind them of the event
- Say they have no feelings about the event
- Show changes in behavior

**Traumatized children need help reestablishing security and stability in their lives.** This can sometimes be difficult, especially in situations where their caregivers are also struggling with their own traumatic experiences. Below are some things you can do to help promote security and stability:

Reference: www.NCTSNet.org
• Show appropriate love and affection: healing begins with relationships. A helpful, supportive adult is the most powerful tool that we have to help children feel safe. And it can help restore their self-esteem. Children need daily reminders that they are lovable, competent, and important.

• Use reassurance and a calm voice when talking to a child survivor of trauma

• Develop safety plans with Student Support Services Team

• Work to create a stable, safe environment

• Help children expand their "feelings" vocabulary; reflect their feelings (“I can see that makes you angry”)

• Set and adhere to routines and schedules to create a stable and safe environment with clear expectations (and consequences)

• Set boundaries and limits with consistency and patience; use reassurance and a calm voice when talking with the child

• Answer children's questions in language they can understand, so that they can develop an understanding of the events and changes in their life

• Find ways to have fun and relax together, and take care of yourself!

Reference: www.NCTSNet.org