



Mary's Center

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Saving lives and creating stronger communities, one family at a time.

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	Elementary School Children	Middle School Children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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:

- 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!