



The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds

Shining light on mental health through education.

Supporting Your Child in the Face of Trauma

Below are ways to support your child and help them build resilience if they have experienced trauma. The key challenge is to try and help your child build emotional skills to manage the trauma and prevent future trauma.

Trauma is an emotional and physical response to a real or perceived threat to safety and security. Examples of threats that can be traumatic include violence, abuse, bullying, and neglect. The threat may be experienced directly by the child or someone they know, or be witnessed through the media, such as with a mass shooting.

Take Care of Yourself First. To best support your child, it is important to **take care of yourself**. If you are experiencing depression, anxiety, economic hardship, domestic violence, or similar stressors, your natural emotional reaction may be difficult for your child.

Be Aware of Possible Negative Influences in the School or Community. Children may face traumatic challenges in their schools and communities, such as community violence, alcohol or substance use, racism and discrimination, and other threats to well-being. Ask them about possible dangers they fear, and have conversations with teachers, other parents, and community leaders. If there are negative influences, you may find ways within your community to make things safer.

Have Frequent Conversations. If you start when children are very young to talk about what dangers, threats, and experiences are scary or upsetting to them, they are more likely to keep talking about these issues as they grow up. These are tough conversations but help to build a sense of trust with your child so that they can go to you or another trusted adult about events in life that may be traumatic.

Make Conversations Teachable Moments. Whether you are supporting a child who has experienced trauma, or enabling them to support peers, your ongoing conversations can be teachable moments. It is important to use your caring relationship and your attachment to your child to help them learn about the negative impact of racism, bullying, and microaggressions among other behaviors that result in trauma. This can help to both support children who have been felt trauma and foster thoughtful children who understand interactions that hurt others.

If you see signs of trauma in your child, early intervention is helpful to lessen symptoms and build resilience. **Some of the most successful treatment methods include:**

- **Psychotherapy.** This includes evidence-based treatments like Exposure Therapy and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT).
- **Medications.** In some cases, there are medications that can be used *short-term* to help provide relief from symptoms of PTSD.
- **Meditation.** There are many forms of mindful meditation and breathing practice, including online resources and apps. Increasing research shows that mindful meditation helps with stress, anxiety, PTSD, and promotes resilience and well-being.
- **Self-Help Groups.** There can be great relief found in talking with others who have had similar experiences.
- **Support from Family and Friends.** When people are traumatized, they often shut down emotionally and feel isolated. It is important for you and your child to connect with and find support from peers and family members following a traumatic event.

The effects of trauma *can* be treated, but it can be a painful challenge. Don't let your child suffer alone.

Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life. It really makes a difference.

For more resources on trauma and other topics, visit us online: mghclaycenter.org

