

What You Need to Know...



Children and Emotional Distress

Long Term Stress Response

Responses to trauma can vary according to the age of the child. Generally, children respond by reverting to behavior typical of an earlier developmental stage. These response are considered NORMAL if they are of brief (less than three weeks) duration.

Children who are having a difficult time coping may show any of these symptoms

- Eating or sleeping problems, nightmares
- Headaches, stomachaches without physical cause
- Behavior problems at home or school
- Startle reactions to loud noises, such as sirens
- Fear that the trauma will be repeated
- Withdrawal, decreased or increased activity level
- Decline in academic performance, without reason
- Depression or panic
- Prolonged sadness
- Confusion
- Accident Prone
- Violent fantasies
- Inattentiveness
- Irritability

The key is to watch for behavior that is unusual for your child.

Age Related Responses to Trauma

Ages 1-6

- Bedwetting
- Thumb sucking
- Fear of animals
- Speech difficulties
- Crying
- Wetting Pants
- Fear of crowds
- Re-enacting event
- Excessive clinging
- Loss of bowel control
- Fear of being left alone
- Wants to go to heaven

Ages 7-11

- Bedwetting
- Disobedience
- Distractibility
- Avoids talk of event
- Irrational fears
- Excessive clinging
- Fighting
- Re-enacts the event
- Irritability
- Vision/hearing impairment
- Refusal to go to school
- Wanting to die*

Ages 12-18

- Running away
- Increased sleep
- Use of drugs
- Aggressiveness
- Suicidal thoughts*
- Violent fantasies
- Use of alcohol
- Relationship trouble
- Stealing
- Avoids talking of event
- Sexual acting out
- Risk-taking behavior*

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**Any suicidal talk or actions should be taken seriously. Professional help should be sought immediately. Younger children do not understand the permanence of death, so do not understand the consequences of “suicidal” behavior. Even very young children can become suicidal.*

Long-term stress reactions are natural responses of people who have survived a traumatic event. If the reactions last longer than three weeks, it may be beneficial to seek counseling help.

Helping Kids Bounce Back

- **Help children feel in command.** A feeling of personal control over events helps children handle stressful times.
- **Provide a sense of order and stability.** Key people, as well as rituals and traditions, may serve as anchors.
- **Keep the lines of communication open.** Lend an ear and offer encouragement when the going gets rough. Children need the feeling of basic security and trust – the conviction that “somebody is there.”

How to Talk to Teenagers

- **Encourage and compliment your teenagers.** They will draw strength from what they do well. This will help them deal with the challenges.
- **Prepare your teens for the real world and the future.** Give teens responsibility and trust that your teen will carry it out. If they don’t carry it out, allow consequences to occur and express understanding. Then, turn right around and give them the responsibility all over again.
- **Avoid the 3 R’s: ranting, raving, and rescuing.** It is almost guaranteed to bring out the worst in a teen.
- **Give them these three messages daily:** I love you; If you have questions, ask; and Accept new challenges (this gives teens the responsibility to solve problems).

Kids in Trouble

Young people having a crisis may perceive their problems as inescapable and feel an utter loss of control. There are some common warning signs of trouble and potential suicide. When noticed and acted upon, these signs can reduce suffering and save lives.

- Suicide threats
- Unexplained crying, sadness
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Changed eating or sleeping patterns
- Isolation
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawal from activities of previous interest
- Cutting or burning oneself
- Unexplained crying, sadness
- Obsession with death
- Irrational, bizarre behavior
- Severe drop in school performance
- Takes unnecessary risks
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Giving away belongings
- Previous suicide attempt
- Dramatic change in personality or appearance

Listen for a cry for help and show that you care.

If you think a person might be suicidal, believe and trust your suspicions and....

Take Action.

Remove Means.

Get Help.

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.

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