

How Teens React to Trauma and How to Help (12 years old to 18 years old)

* These common reactions to traumatic events are based on typically developing 12-18yr. olds. The term traumatic event is being used to describe an overwhelmingly frightening situation that has affected the teen.

Common Responses/Behaviors after Experiencing or Exposure to a Traumatic Event:

- Has trouble sleeping or is having nightmares
- Has behavior or mood changes (aggressive, sad, withdrawn)
- Teen tries to bury or avoid feelings of shame, sadness, and fear
- Starts having problems with friends
- Feels physically sick (headaches or stomachaches)
- Has problems focusing at school, doing homework, and finishing tasks
- Feels guilty or responsible for the trauma
- Doesn't want to talk about what happened or about his/her feelings
- Starts doing impulsive or risky things (driving fast, using drugs and/or alcohol)

How to Help Your Teen:

- Listen to the re-telling of the story. At the end of the story, ask who came to help and when the teen knew he/she was safe. This ensures that the teen is not emotionally left in the scariest part of the story, but instead ends the story at a safe place.
- Be available, but respect the need for privacy
- Give opportunities for open and honest discussion
- Help find friends or other trusted adults to share thoughts/feelings
- Tell teen his/her feelings are important and real
- Help the teen to think of ways to feel safe
- Talk with the school staff about how to help your teen
- Be aware that lots of things (situations, places, and sights/sounds/smells) might remind the teen of the trauma. Make a plan to help them cope with the reminders.
- Keep rules and routines the same as they were before the trauma
- Be aware of your own reactions and take care of yourself as well

If you are worried about your child's behavior or emotions please contact a mental health counselor for support

Online Resources:**National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

<http://www.nctsnet.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers>

After the Injury**Information for caregivers:**

<http://www.aftertheinjury.org/sites/ati/files/hospitalteen.pdf>

<http://www.aftertheinjury.org/sites/ati/files/aftertheinjuryhelpingmyselfcope.pdf>

Palo Alto Medical Foundation

Information for teens: <http://www.pamf.org/teen/life/trauma/>

References**Publishing:**

Monahan, C. (1997) *Children and trauma: A guide for parents and professionals*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Online:

After the Injury <http://www.aftertheinjury.org/quick-tips>

National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network <http://www.nctsnet.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers>

National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC) <https://www.starr.org/training/tlc/resources-for-parents>

Palo Alto Medical Foundation <http://www.pamf.org/teen/life/trauma/>