



Supporting Children & Young People After Potentially Traumatic Events

If you're reading this, you may be supporting a child or young person after a very distressing event. Whether you are a parent, carer, or trusted adult, the fact that you're seeking guidance shows how much you care. Simply being calm, present, and thoughtful can help a child feel safe again.

This leaflet offers practical, evidence-informed suggestions to support school aged children and young people in the first days and weeks after a frightening event.

How might a child respond to a traumatic event?


Children respond to trauma in different ways. What is traumatic to one child may not be to another. Although their reactions will be individual to them, some common responses include:

- feeling worried, frightened, upset or unsafe
- nightmares, poor sleep, or tiredness
- difficulties concentrating or learning
- anger, irritability, or becoming withdrawn
- avoiding reminders of the event
- acting in younger ways
- regularly playing or drawing about the event, or themes linked to it
- physical symptoms like stomach aches or headaches

How can I support the child or young person?

Being calm and consistent around a child after something distressing has happened can make a huge difference in helping them feel safe again. Every child's recovery is unique, as is their family and community, but you can support them by:

- Keeping to familiar routines where possible (mealtimes, school, bedtimes)
- Offering honest, age-appropriate explanations
- Letting them know that their feelings are normal – this is different from unintentionally dismissing their feelings by saying *"you're fine"* or *"don't worry"*
- Helping them to find ways of feeling calmer
- Spending quality time together doing activities they enjoy
- Reminding them that recovery takes time and is an up and down process



For more information on this topic — including supporting a child with additional needs and managing social media reports — visit:




uktraumacouncil.org/after-potentially-traumatic-events



Should I encourage them to talk about what happened?

Not every child will be ready to talk straight away, if at all, and that's okay. Try to create a calm, supportive environment where they know they can talk if and when they're ready. You might need to let them know that it's ok if they want to talk about what's happened. You could say something like *'I've been wondering about how you are doing since...'* or *'I've been thinking about what happened, how about you?'* If they do decide to talk, listen patiently, remain calm, and avoid jumping in with solutions or minimising their experience. Simple responses like "I hear you" or "that sounds really tough" can help them feel understood.

When should I seek help?

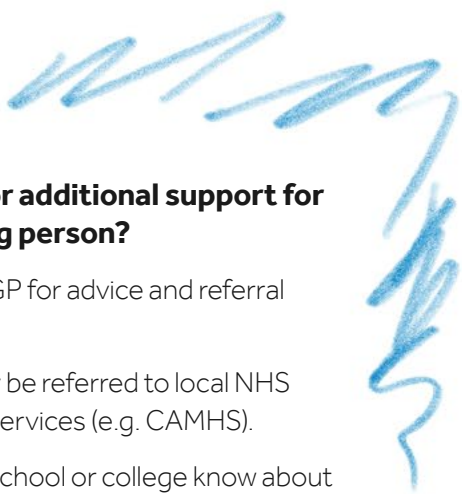


Remember that every child responds differently: with time, patience, and steady support from trusted adults, most children recover without needing professional help. Some don't seem to be affected at all or adjust quickly and others may have delayed difficulties that don't begin straight away. Many of the behaviours and emotions described earlier are common reactions to frightening events that naturally decrease.

Consider seeking professional advice if:

- Around a month after the event, the child is still very distressed and finding it hard to get on with everyday life.
- Their difficulties are getting worse rather than better
- Their symptoms are significantly impacting their daily life, such as withdrawing from friends, missing school, or struggling with daily activities

If you are worried about a child's immediate risk of harm, self-harm, or suicide, call 111 option 2 or visit your local A&E department for urgent help.



Where can I go for additional support for the child or young person?

- Speak to your GP for advice and referral options.
- Under 18's may be referred to local NHS mental health services (e.g. CAMHS).
- Let the child's school or college know about your concerns, as they may have support pathways or staff already in place that your child can use.
- For urgent help in the UK, call 111 or visit A&E

How can I take care of myself?

Supporting a child through trauma can be challenging, especially if you are also directly impacted by the event. Sometimes events can have a big impact on not just one child or one family but on a whole community and that can be a lot to cope with. Children often take their emotional cues from adults, so letting them see that you're impacted too and can seek help when needed provides them with a healthy model for coping and can help them feel less alone.

Be kind to yourself:

- Prioritise your basic needs: eat, stay hydrated, and rest whenever possible
- Talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling
- Make time for activities that help you feel calm
- Share caregiving responsibilities if possible
- Seek support from your GP if things begin to feel unmanageable.

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