



Health and Wellbeing Support

Helping children to cope after a traumatic event

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS OF CHILDREN

As a parent or carer, you may be reading this because your child has been affected by a traumatic event and you may be unsure how to support your child.

Children are resilient and with your support and the support of others close to them, they can cope successfully with most situations.

Each child is different and how your child will react to what has happened will depend on a number of factors such as your child's age, whether he or she was exposed to the event, how your child had dealt with past losses and how you are coping.

This leaflet describes common reactions of children to trauma, how you as a parent or carer can help and where to go for further information and support.

Common Reactions of Children to Traumatic Events

Some children may have very little reaction following a traumatic event, while others may react in a variety of ways immediately or seem okay at first but react later. Normal, common reactions may include the following:

Physical Reactions

Children may experience increased feelings of anxiety and fear which may result in physical reactions such as headaches, stomach aches, loss of appetite or changes in sleep pattern.

Regressive Reactions

You may notice your child reverting back to some behaviour that they had previously grown out of such as bed wetting, thumb sucking, excessive clinging and not being able to sleep alone at night.

Emotional and behavioural reactions

Children may experience sadness, anger, moodiness, distress. They may be quiet or tearful or they may have tantrums and be overactive. They may find it difficult to concentrate and pay attention in play or in school. They may want to continually talk about the trauma; others may express their feelings in play and drawings.

Feeling Unsafe

Your child may worry that something bad will happen to them again. He or she may not like to separate from you as a parent or carer and become distressed if separated for an extended length of time.

Recurring Memories of the Event

Children can be triggered into remembering the event by seeing something that reminds them of it and also by smells or feelings they felt at the time of the event. Memories can come in the form of flashbacks or nightmares and can be very frightening for your child. Flashbacks of previous traumatic events can recur. Moments of panic and fearing for their safety can result.

How you as a Parent or Carer can Help

After traumatic experiences, it is important that you accept that your child will be distressed; this is normal. Accepting this can help you to support your child: You can offer safety, promote your child's understanding of the experience, and help them to get back to normal life.

Children are more sensitive and "tuned in" to what's going on than most people realise and are always watching how the adults around them react. By making sure that you deal with your own feelings, you will also be helping your child. This can be difficult especially if you as a parent or carer have been directly affected yourself by the traumatic event. Taking care of yourself is important including getting enough sleep, eating well, sticking to routines and seeking support from others.

If your child is in school or nursery, it will help to inform them so that staff are aware of what has happened and can be alert to any signs of distress in your child and offer support.

Ensuring a safe environment

- Reassure your child that they are safe, loved and that they have someone to talk to. As your child will look to you for assurance, it is ok that they know you feel upset to but don't burden them with your own fears and worries. Assure your child that you are there for them, and that you will get through this.
- Let them talk, draw or use play to express their feelings. Help them understand that their feelings are normal.
- Avoid unnecessary separations from your child in the early aftermath of the event. When separating always tell them when you will return.
- Re-establish daily routines, example school and hobbies as soon as possible as this will provide the child with a sense of security and a sense that life is returning to normal.
- Protect your child from media cover of the event as it can trigger further fears.

Answer their questions

- Allow your child to explain what they believe happened in their own words first, so that you can correct any misunderstandings that they may have about what happened.
- Let them ask questions and know it's ok to talk about it.
- Listen to what they have to say and try to answer their questions as honestly as you can but at a level appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Depending on the situation, you may need to explain what death means.

Let them be involved

- If there is a funeral or memorial event, explain to your child what is involved and let the child attend if they wish to. This way the loss is made real for them but don't force your child to attend.
- Explain to them what will happen before they attend, and if they would like to do something like a drawing/picture for the deceased.
- Have keepsakes for your child to remember the deceased.

Offer Support

- Let your child know that you are there for them.
- Give them the option to talk to someone outside the immediate family if they wish.
- Help them anticipate and deal with reminders such as anniversaries and birthdays. Remind your child that these triggers will get easier with time.

Seek help if you are worried

Most children exposed to traumatic experiences show some of the reactions outlined above. Fortunately, these usually lessen in the days and weeks after the event.

If the distress and reactions to the traumatic experience are marked and do not improve over the weeks and months following the trauma, you should seek mental health support.

If you as a parent or carer are worried about your child and how they are coping, you may find it helpful to talk to your GP who can discuss the support options available, including a referral to the Children and Families Hub.

You can also call the Children and Families Hub yourself and request to speak to a Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner for advice and guidance. They will listen to the difficulties your child is experiencing and if needed, arrange an assessment by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to determine whether therapeutic support should be offered.

Useful Support Services



Children and Families Hub

Information, advice and support for families and young people

Open Monday – Thursday 8:30am to 5:00pm, Fridays 8:30am to 4:30pm

Contact: 01534 519000

Email: childrenandfamilieshub@gov.je

gov.je/childrenandfamilieshub

YES (Youth Inquiry Service) and CAMHS Saturday Wellbeing Drop-In

Available to parents, carers and young people. A mental health practitioner is available to answer any questions in a private space and to provide support and guidance.

Open every Saturday from 11am – 4pm

Held at The Link, Eagle House, La Colomberie, St Helier, JE2 4QB

Tel: +44 (0) 1534 280530

Email: yes@jys.je

Jersey Talking Therapies

Mental health support for adults from 18 years

Contact: 01534 444550

Email: JTT@health.gov.je

gov.je/talkingtherapies

Jersey Hospice

Community bereavement service available to adults, young people and children

Contact: 01534 285144

jerseyhospicecare.com

Childline

Support for children and young people online, by email or by phone

Freephone: 0800 1111

childline.org.uk