

## Normal reactions to trauma

These are the kinds of reactions you can expect from a child who has been involved in a frightening event. You should be concerned if any of these last for a very long time, or if your child is exhibiting most or all of these reactions at the same time.

- Asking questions - the child may want to know whether the person who was injured or killed suffered or felt pain
- Wanting to talk about what happened
- Not wanting to talk about what happened
- Acting out the trauma when they are playing
- Drawing pictures about the trauma
- Imagining or seeing a replay of the trauma in their minds
- Feeling angry or talking about taking revenge
- Expressing fears of death or fear of being left alone
- Nightmares
- Trouble sleeping
- Bed wetting
- Physical complaints like stomach aches or headaches
- Feeling "clingy" and wanting to be physically close to loved ones all of the time
- Trouble concentrating or trouble in school

# TRAUMA

**For  
Parents**



For mental health resources, referrals and information on health insurance, call the Mayor's Health Line at (617) 534-5050.

In case of a mental health emergency call the BEST Team at (800) 981-HELP or call 911.

For information on-line, go to [www.talklisten.org](http://www.talklisten.org).

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## Healing after Trauma.

**How to  
deal with  
bad things  
that happen  
to you,  
your family  
and your  
community.**



# HEALING

## Helping your child deal with trauma

Tragic or frightening events can affect all of us, especially children. As a parent, there are signs you can look for and things you can do to help your child get through this difficult period.

## What's a "normal" reaction to a tragic event?

Each child will respond to trauma in his or her own way. Some children will want to talk about what happened and ask questions. Other children will not want to talk at all. Some will be afraid to go out of the house or to be apart from their parents. Others will want to go right back to their usual activities like

### All of these ←

are normal responses and there is not one way that a child is supposed to act or feel. As a parent, you know your child best. If your child's reactions seem serious to you - such as extreme, uncontrollable anger or sadness that goes on for weeks at a time, or anything else that you think is unusual - don't be afraid to get help. Call your child's doctor or counselor, if he or she has one. Find out if your school has resources. Call other parents whose children may have had similar experiences.

## How can you help your child during this difficult time?

After a frightening event, children want to know that they and the people they love will be safe. You can let them know they are safe in many ways:

**Reassure your child.** Let him know that you are doing everything you can to make sure that he is safe.

**Be honest.** If your child wants to talk about what happened, be ready for questions like, "What happened?, Why did it happen? and Will it happen again?" Children are literal-minded and like to know specifics, but you don't have to go into great detail.

**Acknowledge your child's feelings.** Let your child know that what she has been through is very upsetting. If she wants to talk about what happened, you can support her with empathy, saying things like "That must have been very scary."

**Tell your children you love them.** Your child may need to hear this even more than usual after a traumatic incident.

**Hug your child.** After trauma some children may simply want to be physically close. Simply cuddling with your child can be more important than talking.

**Don't force your child to talk if she is not ready.** Some children will want to talk, others will not. Some may choose to draw pictures about the trauma or act it out when they are playing.

**Maintain usual routine and rules.** Sometimes parents want to relax the rules because their child is going through a tough time. But sticking to the usual routine - like bedtime and meals - often makes children feel safe and cared for.

**Make sure your child eats and sleeps well.** Many children - especially very young ones - can become irritable when they don't eat or sleep well. This only becomes worse after a traumatic event.

**Don't let your child watch violent movies, video games or television for a while --- including the news.** They can make your child relive the event over and over in his mind.

**Don't let your child hear your distress since this may only add to his.** Like your child, you may be having physical reactions yourself. You may feel angry about larger problems in society like violence or the government. Instead of venting to your child, find another supportive adult - a friend or counselor - that can help you.

**Call your child's pediatrician to let her know what happened.** Your pediatrician can offer specific advice based upon her knowledge of your child's personal history.

**Give your child time.** It may be days or weeks before your child feels completely safe again. Be patient with your child and find out what she needs to feel safe again.

**Focus on the positive.** Remind your child that most people are kind and caring. Try not to focus on blame.