



# HELPING YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND A TRAUMATIC EVENT

## BE HONEST AND REASSURING

When a traumatic event occurs, children of all ages take cues from the adults they trust. It is important to be honest and realistic when explaining an event, but children also need reassurance and a sense of safety. Start by asking what they have heard or sharing a basic summary of events and then listen to their thoughts and fears. Remember that children and adolescents interpret events differently based on their own developmental level and personal experience. It is natural for them to ask a lot of questions and seek to understand.

## WATCH FOR SIGNS OF CONCERN

The range of typical responses to traumatic events is broad. Some children are able to move on without major impact to their daily functioning or ability to interact with others. However, significant changes in behavior such as excessive crying, eating and sleeping issues, somatic complaints, intense fear, withdrawal, nightmares, and irritability are a signs of possible traumatic stress. Be aware of your own child's behaviors and seek professional help if things don't get better.

## LIMIT ACCESS TO MEDIA COVERAGE

It is hard for adults to avoid media coverage of a dramatic situation, and kids are no different. They may hear details of an event from friends, the television, radio, social networking sites, or overhear conversations public places. You may not be able to insulate your child everywhere, but monitor their access closely. Younger children should have limited exposure and adults should check in with older children and teens on a regular basis to monitor their exposure and emotions.

## CONSIDER OTHER RISK FACTORS

If your child already has a mental health condition or struggles with emotional regulation, he or she may likely be more impacted by news of a traumatic event. Kids who have recently experienced a loss or trauma in their own lives can also be at higher risk. Events that are human-caused and include violent deaths frequently are more traumatizing. Physical or psychological proximity to the event or victims can also intensify the impact.

## COMMUNICATE WITH THE SCHOOL

If you are concerned about your child, please contact the school staff. The School Psychologist, Social Worker, or Counselor can help monitor and support students during the school day and provide you with additional resources. Adolescents should be reminded of adults who are available at school and reminded to check in with someone if they are upset. After a major event reminds us of what is important, it can be difficult for parents to leave their children at school. All parents have to use their own judgment, but we know that kids benefit from a regular daily routine and frequently move on emotionally more quickly than adults.

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

The best resource for a child's recovery is a caring adult who is healthy and emotionally available. Make sure you take the time to care for yourself. Adults who are already managing stress from work, relationships, and parenting can easily feel overwhelmed when a traumatic event occurs. Help your kids learn health habits by demonstrating them yourself.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

National Center for School Crisis & Bereavement	<a href="http://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org">www.schoolcrisiscenter.org</a>
National Child Traumatic Stress Network	<a href="http://www.nctsnet.org/">www.nctsnet.org/</a>
American Academy of Pediatrics	<a href="http://www.aap.org">www.aap.org</a>
Colorado Crisis Services	<a href="http://coloradocrisisservices.org/">http://coloradocrisisservices.org/</a>
Safe2Tell	<a href="https://safe2tell.org/">https://safe2tell.org/</a>
<b>AllHealth Network</b>	<a href="http://www.admhn.org">www.admhn.org</a>
(303)730-3303 Crisis Line	Crisis Walk-In Center (open 24/7/365)
(303)730-8858 Appointments	6509 S. Santa Fe Drive