

## Key messages for parents and carers: How to support your child after a traumatic event

Normal routines and relationships can be key to helping your child process and adjust to a traumatic experience. It is important to also keep in mind any particular care and attention they may require. Every child is different, so any response needs to be tailored to their needs.

- Please look after yourself and get support from friends and family, if possible so you are best able to be available and have the emotional capacity to support your child's needs.
- Try not to make to any assumptions as to what your child may be thinking or feeling, and guard against putting your concerns on them, they might not have witnessed or understood what was happening the same way you have.
- Be connected and available AND follow the child's lead - there is no right way to process this experience.
- It's important to have a balance between doing nurturing and grounding activities, having someone to talk to when and if the child wants to, getting on with normal activities and engaging with fun activities that give us a break from thinking about it - the key to this sentence is **BALANCE** - all of these things are important at the right time and pace for your child
- Be aware of intrusive information, which is not helpful, from peers, social media, and the news, but again, follow the child's lead. They may want to have some connection with the broader conversation - but make sure this is not overwhelming and does not get in the way of other activities which will help process the experience
- Provide opportunities to take a break from what has happened. Your child will benefit from shifting their focus to other activities that are fun and absorbing.
- Return to normal routines. Engaging in normal or familiar routines, where possible, can help your child feel more safe and secure.



## Listening to your child

- It is important to recognise that children should not be expected to talk.
- Take the lead from the child and be available when they want to talk.
- Let them talk at their own pace – it's important not to pressure or rush them.
- Focus on listening.
- Respect what they choose to share, rather than asking lots of questions.
- Acknowledge what they are saying - when someone feels heard, they can move on in their thinking.
- Only give advice if you're asked to.



## Supporting someone experiencing a flashback

Flashbacks are vivid experiences in which someone relives some aspects of a traumatic event. It can be hard to know how to help during a flashback. You don't need special training to support someone who is having one. It could help if you:

- Try to stay calm.
- Gently tell them that they are having a flashback.
- Avoid making any sudden movements.
- Encourage them to breathe slowly and deeply.
- Encourage them to describe their surroundings.

## Supportive exercises

- Helpful ways to calm the body and mind through simple repetitive physical activities such as colouring, going for a walk, passing a ball back and forth - can all be soothing.
- Even without words, particularly if we know someone is joining us, understands us and is available.
- Slowing our breathing and purposely relaxing muscles is also helpful, as it can calm our nervous system and reminds us that we are safe.

- Inform the wider support network, including school.
- Let your child know who they can turn to for support from school or family. This can be especially useful if your child is worried about burdening you. Make sure to let these people know you have identified them in this way so they can let you know of any concerns they have.



- Notice if your child is avoiding certain things. This can be a natural strategy while the body and mind cope with shock. However, it is helpful if they don't get stuck with this initial way of coping.
- If necessary, you can help your child get back to their normal activities by breaking an activity down into manageable steps making sure they feel safe and calm at each step. So, they gradually regain their confidence in engaging in the activity.
- You can develop a bravery ladder with steps agreed with your child. The key here is to help children face their fears in manageable steps, and though they may feel a little bit anxious as they go through each step, they should feel calm and safe at the end of an activity to enable them to go onto the next step.

## How our minds and bodies may respond to traumatic events

- Normal responses to trauma include intrusive thoughts and images, hypervigilance dysregulation, including being switched off, angry or upset, nightmares, problems concentrating, difficulties sleeping, repetitive trauma-related play, avoiding things related to the event, and increased behavioural problems.
- Distress can also manifest as physical ailments, such as headaches, stomach aches, or extreme fatigue.
- It is hoped that the child's support systems and activities will enable them to process the event and return to their normal selves.

## When a child needs more support

- There are no limits to how long processing trauma should take.
- However, most people will go through a process that leads to them adjusting to the experience.
- A small number of people may struggle to cope in the longer-term with the emotional impact of their experience and may develop unhelpful ways to cope that can mean they need additional support.
- It may be more difficult for someone who has suffered other traumatic events.



**If symptoms persist beyond 1 month and are impacting on day-to-day activities, contact your GP to seek further support.**

## Further support and advice

- [BBC Bitesize Is my child showing signs of Trauma?](#)
- [Child Mind Institute Helping Children Cope after a Traumatic Event](#)
- [Butterfly Body Scan](#) Video on YouTube to support relaxation for children
- How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk by [Adele Faber](#)
- [Rethink](#) - Sheffield Under 18 Helpline: 08088010612 . A telephone support service for anyone under 18 experiencing difficulties with their mental health.
- Sheffield Mental Health Guide [www.sheffieldmentalhealth.org.uk/](http://www.sheffieldmentalhealth.org.uk/)
- Sheffield CAMHS: [www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/services/camhs/](http://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/services/camhs/)
- [Sheffield CAMHS Epicfriends website for 12 years and older](#)