

Returning to school after a trauma

How to help your child

A traumatic event can include any experience that is shocking, scary, or dangerous and affects your child emotionally and physically.

A traumatic event may include:

- Physical pain
- An accident
- A serious injury
- A natural disaster
- Witnessing a traumatic event

After a trauma, returning to your child's everyday routine is an important part of the healing process.

Returning to school

Returning to school provides your child with many predictable activities.

Children do best when they know what to expect and can return to their normal school routine. But returning to school can also become challenging.

Emotions and feelings

After a trauma, children may often experience different emotions when just thinking about returning to school. Your child may become:

- Anxious
- Nervous
- Scared
- Withdrawn
- Worried
- Overly excited

Behaviors and actions

Many of these emotions may change the way your child acts and behaves. Your child may:

- Start acting younger than their age
- Have mood changes
- Have problems sleeping
- Have trouble separating from parents
- Start acting out or misbehaving

The following guidelines will help you to prepare and support your child during these challenging times. It is important to develop a trusting relationship with your child as they begin to reenter school and other peer interactions.

Meet with staff at school or childcare

Talk with teachers and school staff to create a plan for your child.

- Give basic information about the accident and hospitalization.
- Discuss how your child is emotionally adjusting to the traumatic event.
- Share calming techniques when your child is stressed or upset.

Getting emotionally ready for school

Show you care

This was a hard event in your child's life. Be there for your child when they are feeling sad, scared, or even happy.

Listen

Do not push your child to talk about the event. They will talk about it when they are ready.

- Listen to what your child is thinking and feeling.
- Allow all types of feelings. Reassure your child that these feelings and worries are very important and are okay.
- Sometimes it's easier for a younger child to draw out these feelings on paper.

Share with your child, "It is ok to feel scared. Sometimes I feel scared, too."

Provide safety

- Reassure your child that they are safe.
- Help your child think of things that make them feel safe at home and at school.

Preparing your child for questions about the trauma and hospitalization

After a traumatic event, your child's friends often want to know what happened and what it was like in the hospital. Help your child share their story of the accident or hospitalization with their friends.

Encourage questions

Encourage your child to ask questions about the accident and hospital stay.

- It is ok to not have all the answers.
- Have your child write down their questions to ask their doctor.

Encourage play

Let your child "pretend" play about the trauma.

- Play is how children learn and sort out what has happened to them.
- Listen as they tell their story about the trauma.
- At the end ask, "Who came to help you?" and "When did you know you were safe?"
- For younger children you can ask "Who is helping the toys?" or "How can the toys feel safe?"

Encourage expression

Draw or Journal. Allow children to use descriptive words addressing what they saw, felt, and smelled.

Some children may need help. Try guiding them with certain prompts.

For example:

- When the accident happened, I was....
- The hospital did different tests to check on how my body was on in the inside.
- Some things I remember about the hospital are...
- After I left the hospital, the doctors told me I needed to rest my body while it continues to heal. Some of the things I am still able to do are...
- The thing I'm most sad about is....
- I am most thankful that ...

Child Life

For contacts and locations visit:

www.cookchildrens.org/medical-center/fort-worth/family-support/child/life/



These instructions are only general guidelines. Your healthcare provider may give you special instructions. If you have questions or concerns, please call your healthcare provider.