

Traumatic Events

Includes car accidents, falls, animal attacks, burns, sporting accidents, etc.

A traumatic event is an unexpected event or accident that often leads to a physical injury.

- Physical injuries may be minor and temporary or severe and long-term.
- Traumatic events may also cause emotional and mental reactions for young children.

Common Reactions

It is common for even a young child to feel nervous, upset, confused, unsure, or angry after experiencing a traumatic event.



Other common reactions and behaviors include

Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has trouble separating from parents. • Is more clingy than normal.
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is afraid to do something related to the trauma. For example nervous about getting into the car after a car accident. • Afraid to be alone.
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child has changes in behavior or mood. • Acting more irritable, scared, or fussy than usual. • Has temporary loss of newly learned skills. • Withdraws. Does not talk or play as much as usual.
Regresses	<p><u>Acting younger than the child's age:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses fewer words than before. • Starts wetting pants after being toilet trained. • Crawls instead of walks.

Helping Your Child

First take care of you!

Become aware of your own feelings and reactions to the traumatic event. Keep in mind that different people respond to trauma in different ways, especially young children. You will need to be calm, patient, positive, reassuring, and understanding.



Guidelines for helping your child after a traumatic event

You Are Safe	Reassure your child that they are safe. Be calm. Speak in a soft voice. Use simple, comforting words or sounds to provide comfort.
Calm	Create a calm environment. Give your child their favorite toy or blanket for comfort. Infants and toddlers can become overwhelmed with loud noises or extra visual stimulation. Limit music, electronics, and other loud or noises. Avoid toys with bright flashing lights.
Rules and Routines	Keep rules, routines, and schedules the same as before the trauma. Make sure your child is getting enough sleep, eating healthy and regularly. Make sure child is having regular time with parents or caretakers.
Family and Friends	Schedule more time with family and friends. After experiencing a trauma, your toddler will need this extra support from trusted family and friends. And don't forget your child's brothers and sisters. They'll need your support and reassurance too. Siblings are often scared, upset, and confused about the trauma, even if they were not directly involved.

Where and when to get help:

Your child may need extra help if they are:

- Still very clingy and/or withdrawn a few weeks after the trauma.
- Still fussy or extremely irritable a few weeks after the trauma.

Please reach out to your doctor or call a mental health counselor if you are concerned about your child's behaviors or emotions.

Child Life

Helping children cope with traumatic events

Child Life specialists know how to explain things to children in simple ways they can understand. They are available in all Dodson Specialty Clinics. There is no charge for child life services.

If you would like to see a Child Life specialist or would like help coping with this traumatic event:

You can ask to speak to a child life specialist at your next clinic appointment.

You can also call or email us at:

Phone: 682-885-4048

Email: DodsonChildLife@cookchildrens.org

Other Resources:

Books:

Worries are Not Forever by Elizabeth Verdick

Mindfulness (Baby's Big World) by Alex Fabrizio

Online:

Sesame Street: Traumatic Experiences:

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/traumatic-experiences/>

After the Injury: <https://www.aftertheinjury.org>

Tip Sheets- <https://www.aftertheinjury.org/tools-parents-help-their-children-and-themselves-recover-injury>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<https://www.nctsn.org>

For Caregivers:

<https://www.nctsn.org/audiences/families-and-caregivers>

For children:

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//what_do_i_say_talking_about_what_happened.pdf

These instructions are only general guidelines. Your health care providers may give you special instructions. If you have any questions or concerns, please call your health care providers.