

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 children.

Common Reactions

It is common for a school-age 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"> • Feels guilty or responsible for the trauma, accident, or injury. • 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 being in the car after a car accident. • Afraid to be alone.
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child has changes in behavior or mood. • Keeps telling the story about the trauma, accident, or injury over and over. • Acts or plays out the traumatic event. • Has temporary loss of newly learned skills. • Acts younger than their age, for example starts bed wetting. • Trouble focusing at school or finishing tasks like homework.
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child feels physically sick with headaches or stomachaches. • Child has trouble sleeping or nightmares.
Triggers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain places, situations, and sights/sounds/smells will trigger a memory of the trauma.

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. Help your child think of things that make them feel safe.
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 ok. Sometimes it's easier for a younger child to draw out these feelings on paper. <i>Share with your child, "It is ok to feel scared. Sometimes I feel scared too."</i>
Pretend Play	Let your child play "pretend" about the trauma. <i>Play is how children learn and sort out what has happened to them.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen as they tell their story about the trauma.• At the end of the story 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?"
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, and going to school (as much as the injury allows).
Family and Friends	Schedule more time with family and friends. After experiencing a trauma, your child 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 nervous a few weeks after the trauma.
- Not doing things they use to enjoy.
- Not wanting to go to school.
- Having difficulty in school.

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:

When Something Terrible Happens: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief

(Recommended for ages 6-12)

A Terrible Thing Happened

(Recommended for ages 4-8)

Once I was Very Very Scared

(Recommended for ages 4-8)

Help your Dragon Cope with Trauma: A Cute Story to Help Kids Understand and Overcome Traumatic Events

(Recommended for ages 5-9)

Online:

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.