

Key messages for parents and carers to support children in the event of a traumatic incident

Normal routines and relationships can be key to helping someone process and adjust to a traumatic experience whilst also keeping in mind any particular care and attention they may require. Everyone is different so any response needs to be tailored to individual needs.

- Please look after yourself and make sure you are getting support from friends and family, so you are in a position to tune in and support your child's needs.
- Do not make any assumptions as to what your child may be thinking or feeling, guard against putting your own concerns on to 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 which 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.
- Talking and listening to children –
 - It is important to recognise that children should not be expected to talk
 - Take the lead from the child, 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 are choosing to share, rather than asking lots of questions.
 - Acknowledge what they are saying - the key thing is that when someone feels heard, they can then 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, but 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
- Helpful ways to calm the body and mind through simple repetitive physical activities - 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 and is available
- 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 wider 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 which are fun and absorbing.
- Return to normal routines. Engaging in normal or familiar routines where possible can help your child to feel more safe and secure.

- Inform the wider support network including school. Tell your child who they can turn to in school or family and friends if they want help. 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 concerns.
- Notice if your child is avoiding certain things. This can be a natural strategy whilst the body and mind are coping with shock, it is also helpful if they don't get stuck with this.
- 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,

When a child needs more support

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, increased behavioural difficulties Distress can also manifest as physical ailments, such as head- aches, stomach aches, or extreme fatigue.

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. However, 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](#)
- 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/
- Sheffield CAMHS: www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/services/camhs/
- [Sheffield CAMHS Epicfriends website for 12 years and older](#)