

Speaker Notes

Trauma and Children: A Guide for Helping Children Manage Traumatic Events

Page 1 – Title Slide

None

Page 2 – Objectives

None

Page 3 – Agenda

None

Page 4 – Introduction

- Children can be affected by trauma whether they have actually witnessed it or have heard about it: Even if they have only heard about it from friends and family or the media, just like adults, they can still be affected and experience trauma almost as if they were there.
- Some children recover very quickly; others have more difficulty: The response to trauma is an individual response. Some children don't have significant reactions until several weeks or even months after the event; others have reactions immediately. Not all children will have significant responses, but it's best to be prepared in case they do.
- You can't always protect them from trauma, but you can learn ways to help them cope and handle their feelings: Today we will be looking at ways to assist children in recovering from a traumatic event.

Page 5 – Children's Fears

- Children can have fears similar to adults. However, they don't have the same life experience and have not developed their own coping skills. That is why they need your help.

Page 6 – Subtitle Slide

- It's important to look at the possible reactions of children and youth at different ages and stages of development in order to respond appropriately. This information can help in understanding the child's response. We will take a look at these stages in the following slides.

Page 7 – Children 1-5: Possible Reactions to Trauma

- Regress to earlier developmental stage: Bedwetting, thumb sucking, separation anxiety, fear of strangers, etc.
- Refer to the event repeatedly: Younger children may do this in an effort to understand what happened. Younger children learn by repetition and may need a lot of it. Young children also do not comprehend death and may ask questions repeatedly about where a person is who may have died in the event. Try to be patient; the repeated questions will subside once the child feels they comprehend better.
- May withdraw from family and friends: They may not be interested in playing with other children or going to preschool, and they may want to stay in their rooms or they may stop talking.

- Develop behavior problems: May become angry and irritable and act out these feelings inappropriately at preschool, daycare or home, becoming aggressive with peers or adults—for example, throwing things, kicking, biting and screaming.
- May feel they caused the event: Sometimes younger children believe the event happened because of something they said or did. For example, “If I hadn’t spilled my milk that day, maybe this wouldn’t have happened.”
- Have changes in eating and/or sleeping routines: Stress can cause changes in appetite—eating too much or not enough

Page 8 – Children 6-11: Possible Reactions to Trauma

- Withdraw from friends and family: Just like the younger children on the previous slide, older children may isolate from others when under significant stress. They may feel it’s safer to keep away from others and social situations. Some children (and adults) respond in this manner to avoid dealing with the feelings about the event. Others may be processing the event on their own, or they may have deep feelings of sadness and feel emotionally immobilized.
- Have a drop in grades: They may be less focused on school work and have difficulty concentrating, or it may be a form of defiance.
- Become angry, aggressive and defiant: In an effort to act out angry feelings, they may become more agitated, argumentative and more aggressive with both peers and adults—for example, starting fights with peers, slamming doors, or throwing things.
- May have changes in eating and/or sleeping routines: As with younger children, stress can cause changes in appetite—eating too much or not enough
- Seek more attention from parents: They may have a desire to cling to parents, having fears that if they separate, something traumatic will happen again. They also may crave more affection and reassurance.
- Fear going to school: Being in public places may be frightening after a traumatic event. Fears of separation from parents may also be present.

Page 9 – Youth 12-18: Possible Reactions to Trauma

- Withdraw from family and friends: Some may tend to isolate in an effort to avoid talking or thinking about the traumatic event.
- Resist authority: Resist doing chores and schoolwork; disregard other responsibilities; ignore curfew; defy parents’ requests; etc.
- Become disruptive at home or school: May act out feelings inappropriately and become verbally and physically aggressive with peers and adults.
- Engage in high-risk behaviors: For example, some may experiment with alcohol or drug use. Older teens may drive recklessly.
- Have a drop in grades: Some may have difficulty concentrating; others may purposely skip school or not do assignments as a way of rebelling against authority.
- Feel helpless and guilty regarding the event: Some may believe they did something to contribute to the event happening, feel that they could have done more to prevent the event from happening, or think they could have done something more to help others during the event. Others may have survivors guilt, wondering, “Why them and not me?”

Page 10 – Subtitle Slide

- We’ve looked at the possible reactions to trauma; now let’s take a look at what we can do to help.

Page 11 – Helping Children Cope

- Encourage children of all ages to express emotions: This can be done through conversation, writing, or artwork. Writing or creating artwork about the event is one of the most effective ways to work through it. Younger children tend to work out their issues through play—especially imaginative play.
- Help them find a way to help others: This is especially true for older children and youth. Helping others is one of the best ways to overcome your own trauma. It helps you get out of your own troubles for a while and provides a way to give back, which helps to relieve feelings of helplessness and guilt.
- Provide lots of reassurance: Younger children especially need lots of reassurance; frequent hugs and cuddling help a lot.
- Maintain security and a normal routine: Keeping routines the same helps to provide reassurance that life is going on as usual. Kids of all ages need consistency of routine and structure to feel safe and secure.
- Encourage exercise and provide nutritious meals: During times of stress, it's important to eat healthy meals. Exercise can help rid the body of physical tension caused by stress.
- For younger children, monitor exposure to media: Some parents may want to limit their child's exposure to graphic or disturbing scenes.
- For older children and teens, watch the news and other media with them: You can't be present when they watch the news all the time, but as much as possible, try to watch with them. This is a time when they questions may come up. It's may create an opportunity to discuss what happened with them.

Page 12 – Helping Children Cope (Continued)

- For younger children, give them something special and comforting to hold and keep nearby: For example, a stuffed animal, doll, or other comforting toy. You can also give them something of yours, such as photograph or a special note. Keeping something nearby can help comfort them and reduce separation anxiety.
- For older children and youth, you may want to lower expectations for a while regarding chores and school: While under stress, most people don't function at 100% of their capability; this includes kids as well adults.
- Use this as a time to establish a family emergency plan: Feeling there is something you can take control of is helpful to both adults and children.
- Help them identify positive things: For instance, heroic actions like families and the community coming together to help.

Page 13 – Tips for Talking to Children

- Answer questions honestly, but don't dwell on disturbing details: Make sure you answer questions in an age appropriate way for your child. Younger children need fewer words and details; they have not developed abstract thinking yet, so the fewer words, the better. Older kids can handle more information. For older children, try to only answer questions they ask. Too much information can be overwhelming. With teens, you can share more information and talk in more abstract concepts.
- Ask your child what he/she thinks has happened: They may have misconceptions, and this is an opportunity to talk with them about what has actually happened. Sometimes the misconceptions they have are worse than the actual facts. Don't deny any facts they may ask about, but talk with them about their fears.

- Don't be afraid to admit you don't have all the answers: Let go of the idea that you must have answers to all of their questions. It's ok for you to say "I don't know, but if I hear anything or figure it out, I'll let you know."
- Let them know you are available to talk with them whenever they need to.
- Acknowledge your own reactions and emotions: Letting your children know that you have some of the same concerns and reactions will help to normalize their own reactions.

Page 14 – Tips for Talking to Children (Continued)

- Help them open up by letting them know it's normal to feel worried: Sometimes kids think something is wrong with the way they feel and think, which only adds to their stress. They will be relieved to know that many people feel the way they do.
- If your younger child is reluctant to talk, have them draw pictures or use puppets or dolls to express their feelings: Children often act out feelings through play. Offer encouragement for this.
- Be patient when they ask the same questions many times: Children learn through repetition and may need things explained to them many times.

Page 15 – When Problems Don't Improve

- If your child's traumatic reactions don't improve, and they interfere with their enjoyment of life, don't be afraid to seek help

Page 16 – Questions

None

Page 17 – Resources

None

Page 18 – References

None

Page 19 – Thank You

None