

Supporting your child after a traumatic event

What is a traumatic event?

Many of us, if not all of us, experience trauma at some point in our lives; a significant event or series of events which are threatening, scary, overwhelming and cause us to feel "out of control" with our feelings and responses. It is important to think about a trauma response being an ordinary response to an extra-ordinary event.



How do people respond to a traumatic event?

Those who have experienced a traumatic event can feel shocked scared guilty angry or vulnerable. It is normal to have periods of distress for the first weeks and months. Your child might have difficulties sleeping or being away from you. They might be more tearful, irritable or worried and might find it more difficult to focus and concentrate. These are all normal responses to trauma.



Most of the time these feelings become more manageable in time, and the person recovers their sense of control and safety without needing professional help.

How can I help my child?

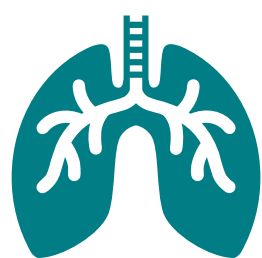
Following a trauma, it is a normal parental response to try and make everything feel better for your children; reduce stress or worries, make everything feel safe and take suffering away. This is of course unrealistic both for you as parents and for your children, as 'feeling better' will take time and support and cannot be rushed. Try not to put pressure on yourself to make everything 'right' for your child; it will happen slowly as you support them on their journey.



If your child has nightmares, you can tell them that whilst they might be scary, they are a normal part of recovery, and their brain is trying to make sense of what happened to them. Be with them and reassure them that it safe for them to sleep now.

What if my child becomes overwhelmed?

7/11 breathing; a quick and easy tool to help avoid panic and return to a state of calm. Practice breathing in counting to 7 and out for 11 (or 4 and 7 if that feels too long). Breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Focusing on counting distracts from the thoughts going through your mind and helps to pace your breathing. Ensuring the "out breath" is longer will bring your pulse rate back down (this is also a useful technique to help people get to sleep quicker!)



Where can I find more support?

Some useful books: Hey Warrior (Karen Young), What a Muddle (Jess Van Der Hoech), Relax Kids: The Magic Box (Marneta Viegas).

Some useful apps: Headspace, Medito, [Wellbeing apps for kids | Internet Matters](#)

Some useful websites: [Young Minds](#), [Managing trauma Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Supporting your child after a traumatic event

You can support your child during this time by fostering resilience and promoting recovery using the five key principles of feeling: safe, calm, connected, in control and hopeful.



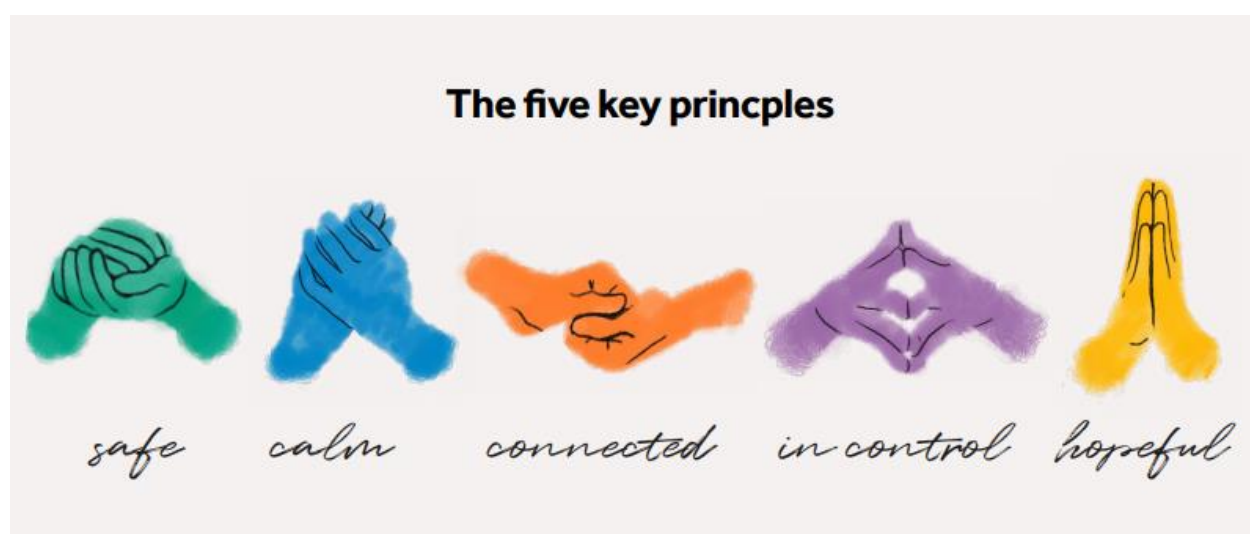
safe

- Give them information that is honest, accurate and reliable.
- Use straightforward language that your child is likely to understand.
- Give enough detail so that they aren't left filling in the gaps themselves.
- Answer their questions – even if the answer is “We don't know yet” or “Can I think about the best way to explain that – I'll come back to you in a bit?”
- Be ready to listen if your child wants to talk and follow their lead.
- Help them make sense of what has happened. Talking about the event, drawing or writing it down can help, when they are ready, with a person they trust and feel comfortable with.
- Remind them that it is OK to feel scared but that they are safe now.



hopeful

- It is natural and understandable to think about what happened a lot.
- We don't want to diminish how hard things are right now but very much want to help your child feel hopeful about tomorrow.
- Can you help them find things to get involved in to foster a sense of hope?
- What can they do to look forward to something in the future?



With thanks to the UK Trauma Council



calm

- After a critical incident strong feelings are normal and although they can be unpleasant, they are not dangerous.
- Some may find it hard to sleep, be on edge, be anxious about being away from you. Some may experience strong emotions in physical ways inside their bodies including aches and pains.
- Let your child 'feel their feelings' rather than rushing them through to try to make them feel 'better.'
- Being calm around your child when they are feeling overwhelmed is key.
- Use familiar activities that help them relax and distract them.
- You know them better than others, so you will know what helps them – energetic games, calming games, music, TV, reading, colouring.
- Try some relaxation activities (e.g., calm breathing, visualisation, grounding activities).
- As much as possible keep to your usual routines (e.g. screen time or bedtime) change too much. At this point your child needs to know that some things are the same as they ever were.



in control

- When something distressing has happened, the world can feel out of control.
- Help your child to make some decisions and influence things about their life can help them feel more in control.
- Give them opportunities to have a say and make simple choices.
- Do comfort them when they need it but also encourage independence where possible.



connected

- Sometimes children and young people isolate themselves after a critical incident.
- Being around others is important – both with friends, school staff and of course with you at home.
- Let staff know if they are struggling to go in to school.
- Look for opportunities to do things together at home to keep the connection and closeness going.
- Draw on the company of others that your child likes to spend time with including your family and wider social network.