



# Children and Trauma

## What is Trauma?

A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens life or physical security of a loved one can also be traumatic. Traumatic experiences can initiate strong emotions and physical reactions that can persist long after the event. Some examples of traumatic events include:

- Physical, sexual, or psychological abuse and neglect (including trafficking)
- Natural and technological disasters or terrorism
- Family or community violence
- Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
- Substance use disorder (personal or familial)
- Refugee and war experiences (including torture)
- Serious accidents or life-threatening illness
- Military family-related stressors (e.g., deployment, parental loss or injury)



## What are some reactions to Trauma?



- Nightmares and night terror
- Nervous behavior
- Worry over safety of loved ones
- Confusion
- Irritability
- Physical complaints
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Poor concentration
- Suppression of emotion
- Anger or rage
- Risk-taking behavior
- Substance abuse
- Talk of retaliation
- Shifts in peer group
- Focus on death
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Increased sense of alienation

## When to seek professional help?

- Any substance use or abuse
- Extended periods of depression
- Ongoing loss of interest in daily activities
- Acting much younger for extended periods
- Excessive imitating of the dead person
- Statements about or acts of self harm
- Ongoing wish to join the dead person
- Withdrawal from friends
- Sharp drop in school performance
- Refusal to attend school or major events
- Dramatic change in eating and/or sleeping
- Violent or threatening behavior



New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, 2001  
National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020 <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma>