First Approach Skills Training for Trauma (FAST-T)

Workbook for Caregivers

This workbook is for parents and caregivers of youth who have experienced traumatic events. Included are handouts you can use on your own, or together with a counselor’s support.
Let’s Make a Plan – Parents/Caregivers

Below are topics you and other caregivers can work on to help kids, teens and yourselves recover after trauma. You can do these on your own or together with a counselor.

- **General tips for supporting youth after trauma (pages 3-4)**
  Learn some good overall strategies for helping kids heal.

- **How to stay connected (pages 5-7)**
  Making time for activities together helps keep your connection strong, which is important after trauma.

- **Get informed about what happened (page 8)**
  Learn more about what your child or teen went through, and understand why their behavior and reactions make sense.

- **Address your own concerns and strong feelings about what happened (pages 9-14)**
  Parents and caregivers often have painful thoughts and feelings. This section gives some exercises that can help.

- **Support youth when the trauma involves racism (pages 15-17)**
  Help youth find ways to cope and feel proud of who they are.

- **Other things you’d like help with?**

  __________________________________________

  __________________________________________
General Tips for Supporting Youth After Trauma

*(Information about trauma can be found on the FAST-T 2-pager)*

**First, let’s talk about you, the caregiver.**

Trauma can be hard for caregivers, for many reasons. You may have gone through the same trauma as your child, and you may be dealing with your own strong reactions. You may feel sad or upset, and there may be new stress (like money or legal issues).

**Did you know:** Many parents have stronger traumatic stress reactions after a child’s trauma than the child themselves!

Your wellbeing is important for your child’s healing. Take care of yourself emotionally and seek support from people in your life, or from trained healthcare providers, who are here to help if you need it.

**What can you do to support your child or teen?**

Love and support from a parent or other caregiver make a huge difference for how kids recover after trauma. Here are some things you can do:

**Provide a sense of safety:** When your child has been abused or if there are safety concerns, do what you can to get your child away from danger. Tell them the ways they are being protected.

**Stay connected:** Spend quality one-on-one time with your child at least a few times each week. Do something your child likes, ask questions about their interests, and follow their lead. Let them know they are important to you.

**Support healthy routines:** Try to get your child back to healthy routines. Things like getting back to school, staying connected with friends, getting regular exercise and healthy food, and doing activities they enjoy are important to regain a sense of balance. Help them get enough sleep each night and stick to regular bed and wake times when possible.
Don’t blame them, and gently correct them if they blame themselves: While it can sometimes be hard to understand a child or teen’s behavior during and after a trauma, trust that they were doing the best they could. Let them know this. You might say: “You did the best you could in a hard situation. I’m proud of you and I know you can get through this.”

Be a listener: Kids often need to talk to someone supportive about what happened. This could be you, another trusted adult, or a mental health provider. If your child tells you about their trauma, try to listen without judging them or becoming very upset. Tell them you are proud of them for sharing. Be careful not to react in ways that make them feel they did something wrong in their trauma, or in telling you. Tell them it’s ok to have strong feelings about it.

Try not to over-protect: It is natural for you and your child to have more fears about safety after a trauma. Try not to let your fears get in the way of letting your child do healthy, normal activities. If you are unsure what is safe, talk with someone you trust, or to a healthcare provider, to figure out what is okay for your child to do.

Remember your child is resilient: Human beings have always had to deal with scary things and loss. We have what it takes to survive. Traumas can even make us stronger.

Are there ideas in the list above that you would like to try out this week?
Make a specific plan for what you will do, and when:
For Parents/Caregivers: Staying Connected

Trauma can impact family relationships:

Traumatic events can make kids and teens feel alone. Sometimes traumas involve losing someone close, or they cause painful disagreements and hurt feelings within the family. Sometimes a youth’s reactions to trauma (like mood changes or misbehavior) put a strain on your relationship.

Some longer trauma treatments (like Trauma-Focused CBT and CBT for Trauma) include family therapy to help repair relationships. Your family might or might not need that level of support.

As a place to start, the FAST-T program recommends parents/caregivers spend some quality time, one-on-one, with their youth. Spending one-on-one time helps because:

- Youths see they are important to you
- Youths and caregivers feel good and more connected
- Feeling connected helps day-to-day life go smoother

Here is how to make quality one-on-one time powerful:

1. Set aside 15-20 minutes, 3 times per week to spend time together.
2. Pick an activity your youth really enjoys, that you can do together:
   - Child examples: Legos, blocks, dolls, cars/trucks, catch, art/crafts, cooking.
   - Teen examples: Making a recipe, going someplace together like the mall or the park or for a walk, doing artwork, playing a sport, playing with a pet, listening to favorite songs, making music playlists for friends, playing interactive video games.
   - Activities to avoid: Watching TV, playing video games that don’t involve interacting, or activities that are too frustrating or competitive.
3. **Ignore minor misbehavior.** Unless the youth is doing something dangerous, just ignore the misbehavior and then return your attention and comment on the NEXT appropriate behavior the youth does. For serious misbehavior, calmly stop the activity for that day.

4. **Never use one-on-one time as a reward or consequence.** One-on-one time is even MORE important on days when there are problems.

5. **Things to try** during one-on-one time:
   - Describe what your child/teen is doing so they feel you are paying attention: “You are so careful when you measure the ingredients.” “You’re going for the 3-pointer!” “I love that color in your picture.”
   - Praise them for the good things you see: “You’re really good at…….” “You have great taste in clothes.”
   - Show you are listening by reflecting back what they tell you: Teen: “I’m good at this game” Parent: “You’re really good at this game.”

6. **Try NOT to do these things** during one-on-one time:
   - Don’t ask too many questions
   - Don’t lecture them or give unwanted advice
   - Don’t give commands
   - Try not to be critical (even if you’re tempted)

7. **With teens: Encourage conversation** during the activity. A really good way to do that is to listen well and show interest in what the teen talks about (even if it is not very interesting to you!): “Thanks for explaining to me about [Warcraft, Farmville, Wii, skateboarding], I didn’t know that.”

8. **Try to be consistent** in spending this special time together, because the benefit builds up over time. It is like money in the bank for the hard times, and makes everyday life much better.
Staying Connected - Continued

Make a plan for this week:

Activities we can try:

Specific times and places we will do one-on-one time:

What I will say about it to my child or teen: (Example: “I want to spend more time together, just you and me. Maybe Tuesday and Thursday after dinner, and Sunday mornings we can spend 20 min doing something fun? What could we do that you would like?”)

Any reminders or support I will need, to make sure I will have the time and space?

Any challenges or obstacles that could come up? How can I overcome them? (Tips: Schedule during times kids won’t have screens. If kids aren’t interested, tell them you’ll still hold the time if they want it. You can also look for times they are having fun during the week and try to join them in the activity.)

If it helps, you can track how it goes below:

Date:

Did I do it?

How did it go?
For Parents/Caregivers: Get New Perspectives

Traumas can be confusing for parents and caregivers. You might not have all the information you want, because your child or teen doesn’t want to talk about what happened. Or you might feel confused or upset about the choices your child or teen made before, during, or after the trauma.

One important way to help youth heal from trauma is to start by assuming that your youth’s actions and feelings make sense. Kids make choices based on their limited life experience, and sometimes (like in the case of assault or abuse) they are influenced or tricked in ways that even they don’t fully understand.

Below are links to handouts for parents and caregivers about different types of trauma. If you can find a resource on the type of trauma your youth experienced, read through it to try to better understand what they went through and how you can support them.

These handout links are from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN):

- Parent/caregiver handout on domestic violence
- Parent/caregiver handout on child sexual abuse
- Parent/caregiver handout on acquaintance rape
- Parent/caregiver handout on parental death
- Parent/caregiver handout on childhood traumatic grief
- General resource page for parents/caregivers (NCTSN) with handouts on many other topics

Were you able to find a helpful resource?

Are there things you learned that were useful?

Is there anything you want to do differently, or supportive things you want to tell your youth?

Are there questions you have for your youth’s counselor? (If you think your question might be hard for your youth to hear, consider asking it privately.)
For Parents & Caregivers: Addressing Your Own Concerns and Strong Feelings About What Happened

Parents and caregivers often have their own strong reactions to a youth’s trauma. Sometimes the parent or caregiver experienced the same trauma as their youth.

This page includes spaces to identify your own questions and needs. The following pages have more activities that help with common caregiver concerns.

First, are there questions you want to ask your youth’s counselor? Are there concerns you have that you aren’t sure what to do about? Write them here, and bring them up with the counselor privately in the next meeting if there is time:

Second, we know that parent/caregiver stress also affects kids and families. If it’s helpful, please write down any good ideas you have about ways you can take care of yourself, lower your stress levels, cope in healthy ways, or get support from people in your life this week:

Pages 10-14 below are about thinking. Thinking has a big impact on caregivers after trauma. The activities on these pages might help you change painful thoughts and feelings you are having.

Sometimes caregivers prefer to do these activities as a conversation with a counselor rather than writing it down. That is another option.
Dealing with Unhelpful Thoughts

Here is a list of some very common unhelpful thoughts that parents and other caregivers can have about traumatic events that happen to their children. Check the box for any thoughts you have had about what happened to your child. (Do this without your youth.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Unhelpful Thoughts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ What happened was all my fault</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ I should have done something different; my actions didn’t make sense</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ I should have known about the abuse sooner</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Our family is destroyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ My child’s life is ruined, their childhood is over</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ There is danger everywhere</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ What happened means something bad about me or my child</td>
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<td>□ I can’t trust anyone anymore</td>
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<td>□ I should feel embarrassed or ashamed about what happened</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ My child should feel embarrassed or ashamed</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ What happened was my child’s fault</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ My child’s actions were wrong, there is no good explanation for how they acted</td>
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<td>□ We cannot heal unless there is justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Other unhelpful thoughts you have (write them): ____________________________</td>
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For a lot of people, these thoughts are part of what makes their trauma experiences more painful, and keep them from healing.

For each Unhelpful Thought you have had, fill in the answers to these questions on the next page, or in a separate journal.

- How does thinking this way affect how I feel and how I act, especially with my child?
- Is it possible this thought isn’t totally true? Come up with all the reasons it might not be true.
- Is there anything I can tell myself besides this thought that can help my child heal, and help my family live our best lives?
Write in your unhelpful thoughts on the left, and then work with the counselor, or on your own, to answer the questions for each one. If you want more space, feel free to write more on another page, or in a journal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My unhelpful thought</th>
<th>How does this thought affect my feelings and actions?</th>
<th>List all the reasons this thought might not be totally true</th>
<th>What is a new thought that can help my child heal and help my family live our best lives?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: My daughter should have told me sooner. Then I could have stopped it.</td>
<td>I feel guilty and sad and angry. I can’t talk to my daughter without both of us getting upset.</td>
<td>Maybe she felt trapped by him and the situation he created. Just because he abused her doesn’t mean my daughter and I did anything wrong. He tricked us both.</td>
<td>I can only control what happens next. I am here for her now.</td>
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Did anything surprise you about answering these questions or talking today with the counselor?
Thinking in a new way takes practice! And some painful thoughts might need more work than just these worksheets.

If what you wrote on the last page was helpful, let’s make a plan to look at what you wrote every day, or at least a few times, in the coming week to help the new thinking stick in your brain.

Consider making a copy or taking a picture of what you wrote in case the paper gets lost.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When will you review this page? Pick some times that will work well for you this week.</th>
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Caregiver Concerns – 4 of 6
Parents & Caregivers: More Practice with Helpful Thinking

Check out these common **helpful** thoughts parents and caregivers have about their child’s traumatic events. Check the box next to any thoughts you have already had about your child’s traumatic experiences. Then for each thought (even the ones you did not check) make some notes about any ways they might be true for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Helpful Thoughts</th>
<th>List any reasons this thought could be true for me</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ What happened <strong>wasn’t</strong> all my (or my child’s) fault</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ I did the best I knew how in a hard situation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ My child did the best they knew how in a hard situation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Our actions made sense at the time</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ I’ve learned some things from what happened</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Some good things might come out of a hard situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ The event doesn’t mean bad things about me</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>□ I can trust at least some people for some things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ We don’t need to feel embarrassed or ashamed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ I can do things to help us stay safe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ There are ways my family can heal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other helpful thoughts you have:</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Caregiver Concerns – 5 of 6
Helpful Thoughts – Practicing New Thinking At Home

Thinking in a new way takes practice! And again, some painful thoughts need more than just worksheets to change them. *You can talk with your youth’s counselor if more in-depth treatment (like TF-CBT or CBT for Trauma) might be helpful after FAST-T to deal with painful thoughts that still feel “stuck” and have not changed.*

If anything you wrote on the “Helpful Thinking” page was helpful, let’s make a plan to look at what you wrote every day, or at least a few times, in the coming week to help the new thinking stick in your brain.

Consider making a copy or taking a picture of what you wrote in case the paper gets lost.

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Supporting Youth Who Experience Racism
Ideas for Parents and Caregivers

Watching children experience a racist world can be heartbreaking, but there are some powerful things parents and caregivers can do to help.

This handout includes three parts. Talk through them with your youth’s counselor or another trusted person in your life. Or you can use these on your own and with your family:

**Part 1** is to help you think about your family’s experience so far.

**Parts 2 and 3** give lots of ideas for helping youth cope with racism and build a healthy connection to their race or ethnicity.

These ideas come from the wisdom of generations of parents and caregivers of color, and from experts in the field. This approach has been shown to boost youths’ self-esteem, decision-making and school performance. It also helps youth feel better about themselves and the world after they experience or witness something racist.

If you aren’t doing these things already, don’t worry—it’s never too late to start!

### Part 1: Questions to think about and discuss.

What do you think your child or teen understands about racism?
What have they experienced? What conversations have you had about racism? How else have you tried to prepare them?

How do you think knowing about or experiencing racism is affecting your child or teen? How do they seem to cope with it?

Do you see signs that your child or teen has come to believe negative things about their racial or cultural group, or their place in the world?

How are YOU coping as a parent or caregiver? How do you make sense of these things for yourself? Who do you go to for support? What gives you strength when you need it?

*(Find links to the experts whose work informed this handout, and more great resources, on the third page.)*
Part 2: Ideas for Helping Kids Cope with Racism

The ideas on this page focus on responding to racism when it occurs. In Part 3 you’ll find ideas for building a positive identity and connecting with cultural strengths, which also boost kids’ coping.

- Ask your child or teen about racism they have witnessed (in their community or online) or experienced themselves. Provide support, answer their questions, and share how you cope and make sense of the situation.

- Share ways you make sense of the world’s unfairness and the ways you cope and find meaning.

- Find ways to take action, together. This might be supporting your community (shopping at a business owned by someone in your racial or ethnic group) or another form of activism you are comfortable with (such as organizing a peaceful protest, voting in a local election, or calling a district attorney).

- Prepare youth for what they can do in racist situations they are likely to face. Teach and practice skills they will need for those situations (like what to do or say). For many families, this includes practicing what to do during encounters with law enforcement.

- Let your kids see you managing stress: for example by talking to another adult, exercising to reduce body tension, doing activities that help bring your attention back to the present moment.

- Share about the history of your ethnic group, or your family history, including ways people have faced injustice, shown strength despite oppression, and achieved things you value.

- Talk with kids about upsetting current events you think they are likely to hear about. Be honest in answering their questions without over-sharing.

- Give youth messages about achievement in the face of barriers. One example is: “You will need to work twice as hard to be rewarded the same.”

- Read books or watch shows together that involve race or racism, and use that as an opportunity to ask what your child noticed and felt, and share your own reactions.

- Celebrate other cultures and discuss the benefits of diversity. As a family, find ways to support other oppressed groups.

- When your stress about racism is high, consider talking to your kids about it. It can be hard to find ways that are age-appropriate to share about racist events, but even something as simple as “seeing people treated mean because of how they look makes mommy sad” helps kids see that you are not upset because of things they did, and it relieves some of the worry kids may feel. It also shows kids it’s OK to have strong feelings, and they can learn healthy ways of coping by watching what you do.

- Encourage habits that can help your child or teen reduce stress levels, like getting enough sleep and regular exercise, or taking breaks from media.

This is a big list, so pace yourself! To start, pick just 1 or 2 things you’d like to try out now:
Part 3: Ideas for Promoting a Positive Identity

- Teach your kids about the historical and systemic causes of inequality, so they won’t see inequality as being caused by individual racial or cultural differences. Books, movies and documentaries about history can help explain hidden causes of inequality.
- Tell your kids that racial stereotypes that exist are false, and draw their attention to counter-examples whenever you come across them.
- Expose your kids to your racial or ethnic heritage, for example by telling stories about your family history, visiting museums or traveling.
- Expose your kids to role models (past or present) from your racial or ethnic group who demonstrate your values and represent your culture.
- Participate in community activities with others from your racial or ethnic group.
- Cook traditional meals or sample traditional foods.
- Be on the lookout for new books, films, or media that relate to your race or culture to enjoy together.
- Teach them that all races are equal and should live together peacefully.
- Show your kids the ways you feel pride in your racial or cultural identity. For example, share your excitement about an artist, author or musician who shares your identity; call out clothes or hairstyles you admire; or comment on your family’s talents and good looks.
- Connect with a religious community or with spiritual beliefs if that is a source of strength for you. Share your own beliefs and spiritual practices, or learn together about the beliefs and practices of your ancestors.
- When possible, build strong connections between your child and their extended family members. Is there a cultural tradition of involving extended family in child rearing? If so, that can be a huge source of strength.
- Share your values and cultural traditions.
- Using media, museums, or your own family stories, highlight examples of strength and determination shown by members of your group.
- Share ways your group has shaped the world or broader culture.
- If school textbooks don’t cover your group’s history, look for books that do. Some examples!
- Use this list of great books, articles, videos and websites, by age and with descriptions.
- For more resources on coping, promoting positive identity, and talking to children about racism, visit the Racial Trauma Guide.

Again, it’s okay to pick just 1 or 2 things you’d like to focus on now. Write any ideas you have below:

This handout was inspired by this paper and created in consultation with Dr. Isha Metzger. Learn more about supporting resilience and healing in African American youth at https://www.drishametzger.com/care-package-for-racial-healing. Check out related resources from Riana Elyse Anderson and embracerace.org for help having “The Talk” with your kids. Sesame Street has a ton of great resources for families and you can find resources for Asian American parents supporting their kids during COVID in English, and several other languages.