What is trauma?

A trauma is an event or series of events that involve fear or threat. Traumas include: child abuse, sexual or physical assault, scary medical procedures, witnessing violence, natural disasters, serious accidents, violent crime, being harmed or threatened because of your race or other group you belong to, and the sudden or violent death of a loved one.

What is “post-traumatic stress” or “PTS”?

PTS means distressing reactions to trauma. You can get PTS for traumas that happen to you or someone close to you, or if you see a trauma happen to someone else. PTS can include:

- Upsetting, unwanted memories of the trauma
- Nightmares or feeling like it is happening all over again
- Trying not to think about the trauma
- Avoiding reminders of the trauma even when the reminders are not dangerous
- Changes in mood like being scared, confused, sad, ashamed or angry a lot
- Feeling super alert, jumpy, nervous, or on edge
- Trouble sleeping or concentrating
- Blaming yourself for what happened
- Thinking you are a bad person because of what happened
- Not trusting people
- Worrying that it will happen again

What causes PTS? Is it normal?

PTS is caused by our memories of the trauma and also our feelings, thoughts and actions when we remember it. Most people have some PTS right after a trauma. Some have stronger reactions than others. For many people, the PTS gets better after a few weeks.

When PTS reactions stick around or seem to get worse, and if they get in the way of doing things that are important to you, it can help to talk to a counselor or therapist.

Even if you have had PTS for a long time, it is still possible to recover and feel better!

What are some things kids and teens can do to help with PTS?

**Try to keep healthy routines:** For lots of reasons, traumas can mess up our normal routines. If you can, try to get back to usual activities like school, doing things you enjoy, spending time with friends or loved ones. Make time for sleep and try to stick to regular bed and wake times. Try to get some exercise to boost your mood, burn off stress, and help you sleep better.

**Remind yourself:** 😊The trauma is over and I am not in danger now. 😊I did the best I could in the situation. 😊Memories can be painful but they are not dangerous.

**Find ways to feel better:** Upset feelings are normal after trauma but they can get in the way of things like learning at school or having fun. Connect with your family, friends, coaches, teachers, pastor, or barber. Try taking deep breaths, tensing and relaxing your muscles, praying, exercising, or using other fun and calming activities to help you reset.

**Overcome fear triggers:** Sometimes normal, safe situations can remind us of a trauma and we get very upset. If we face these situations, our reactions will get smaller with practice. It’s also OK to set boundaries (like unplugging from upsetting news or social media) to lower your stress.

**Don’t use alcohol and drugs:** These can make PTS worse. Try to use other ways of coping.
WAYS YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD OR TEEN

What is it like for parents or caregivers after trauma?

It is often hard for caregivers, for many reasons. You may be having trauma reactions of your own. You may feel sad or upset, and there may be new stress to deal with (like money or legal issues). Did you know: Many parents have stronger PTS after a child’s trauma than the child!

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, 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 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 one-on-one time with your child at least a few times each week. Do something your child likes 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 help them 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 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 or it was their fault. 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.

Trauma in the media: If you see something in the news or media that may be upsetting for your child/teen, ask them about what they know and listen to how they feel.

For more support: Ask your provider about local counseling options like FAST-T or CBT for Trauma.

Safety: If you have a depressed teen in your house, remove any guns from the home and secure all medications. If you think your child might try to hurt themselves, seek professional help right away.