

Mindful Minute

A Mental Health Resource for Parents

VOLUME 09

From Hurt to Healing: Helping Children Thrive After Trauma

As much as we wish we could shield children from pain, life sometimes brings difficult experiences. These may include abuse, natural disasters, the death of a loved one, witnessing violence, serious accidents, or a frightening medical procedure. Experiences like these can overwhelm a person's ability to cope. This is a result of the traumatic event. Research shows that nearly 1 in 3 children will experience at least one traumatic event before age 18.

- It's important to remember that no two children respond to trauma in exactly the same way. Some may have nightmares, flashbacks, restlessness, or sudden fearfulness. Others may avoid reminders of the event, become withdrawn, easily angered, or complain of headaches or stomach aches. These are often normal reactions to something deeply distressing.
- Younger children may act out the trauma in play or return to earlier behaviors, such as becoming clingy or having bathroom accidents. Older children and teens might hide their emotions, turn to distractions, or even experiment with substances to numb painful feelings.



- The encouraging news is that healing and growth are possible. Simple, consistent actions, listening without judgment, keeping routines steady, showing affection, and reminding children they're not alone help rebuild a sense of safety and trust.
- If a child's reactions continue to interfere with their mood, friendships, schoolwork, or self-esteem, reaching out for professional help is a strong and caring step. With support and understanding, children can recover, build resilience, and continue to thrive after trauma.



Communication Strategies

Fred Rogers once said, *"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything mentionable can be more manageable."* Talking with children about hard experiences, like trauma or loss can feel uncomfortable, but open and honest conversations help kids feel understood and supported. The more you practice, the easier it becomes.

Here are some ways to help your child feel safe talking about difficult feelings:

- **Use simple, clear language.** "That was really scary, wasn't it? You're safe now." Avoid overexplaining—reassurance and honesty go a long way.

- **Encourage communication without pressure.** “You seem upset. Do you want to talk about it?” Let your child set the pace and know it’s okay to talk when they’re ready.
- **Validate emotions.** “I can see why you feel that way.” This shows you respect their feelings, even when you can’t fix the problem or you might feel differently.
- **Model healthy expression.** “I was thinking of Grandpa today and felt sad. I’m going to write him a letter with all the things I wish I could tell him.” Children learn emotional skills by watching you.
- **Be honest and age-appropriate.** Trying to “soften” difficult topics can create confusion. Simple, truthful explanations build trust and understanding.

Listen more than you speak. Offer comfort through your presence, not just your words. Remind your child often that they are loved, safe, and never alone in what they feel. Modeling calm communication and healthy coping helps your child learn that even the hardest emotions can be managed.



Family Bonding Activity

Practicing relaxation skills and coping strategies together can be one of the best things for families. Children are more likely to stick with these strategies when they are done together with a safe adult. Picking a specific time and place, such as in the car on the way to or from school, at the dinner table, or right before bedtime can help make it part of the routine.

1. **Deep breathing** – Imagine you have your favorite pizza, but it is really HOT. Breathe deeply through your nose imagining how delicious it smells, then breath slowly out of your mouth like you are cooling down the slice. Do this several times and notice if your body begins to feel calmer.
2. **Grounding with your 5 senses** – Name 5 things you can **see**, 4 things you can **feel**, 3 things you can **hear**, 2 things you can **smell**, and one thing you can **taste**. If there your child is having a hard time naming something they can smell or taste in the moment. Consider using your imagination to name 2 favorites smells and 1 favorite taste.
3. **Movement** – Doing something physical together can help shift the adrenaline or nervous energy we feel though our bodies. This could be a walk around the park, shooting hoops or playing catch, riding bikes, dancing, or even a workout class. Try to make sure the activity is something you both enjoy.

Self-Care

When your child has experienced trauma, it's natural to focus all your energy on helping them heal. Many parents feel that taking care of themselves is selfish, but the truth is, self-care is an essential part of caring for your child. Research shows that children who experience trauma do much better in counseling and recovery when their parents also take time to care for their own emotional well-being too.

- **Physical:** Start with the basics. Try to get enough sleep, drink plenty of water, eat nourishing foods, and move your body by going on a walk or doing a few simple stretches.
- **Mental:** Focus on what you can control, not what you can't. Limit exposure to stressful news or social media. Write in a journal, make a gratitude list, or take a few minutes to just breathe.
- **Social:** You don't have to do this alone. Spend time with people who make you feel supported like friends, family, or other parents who understand. Join a support group in-person or online, and don't hesitate to ask for help with meals, chores, or childcare.
- **Emotional:** Give yourself permission to feel and name your emotions without judgment. It's okay to feel sad, frustrated, or angry. Seek out small moments of joy. Watch a funny movie, listen to music, or practice gratitude. If your emotions feel overwhelming, consider talking to a counselor for your own support and healing.
- **Remember:** Caring for yourself isn't a luxury, it's an act of love that benefits your entire family.

Helpful Resources



Please scan the QR code to explore a variety of mental health articles and videos.



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