



Home and Family Strategies: Trauma Related Concerns

This Quick Fact Sheet contains strategies designed to address potential symptoms of child trauma and should be used in consultation and collaboration with mental health personnel or as part of a larger intervention approach. These pages contain only a portion of many possible strategies available to address symptoms of trauma. Strategies should always be individualized and implemented with careful consideration of the differences of each child and the context of their individual circumstances. Additionally, this information should never be used to formulate a diagnosis. Mental health diagnoses should be made only by a trained mental health professional after a thorough evaluation.

If you notice a significant change in mood in your child that lasts for more than a week, share your observations with your child's pediatrician and with the school mental health support team.

General Strategies for Children Impacted by Trauma

Because of the large number of children who have been exposed to trauma, it would be helpful for parents and guardians to integrate "trauma-sensitive" approaches to their parenting. Critical to a parent's success in raising a child impacted by trauma is the establishment of safe, supportive, and stable homes and support systems to which traumatized children feel connected. The relationship between a child and his or her parent/guardian is a central factor in how traumatized children function. In order to function successfully, children with post trauma stress must feel that their caregivers (ie. those family members with whom children spend significant amounts of time) can be trusted to keep them emotionally and physically safe.

Strategies for Attachment and Other Social Difficulties

- Get to know your child well and work hard to form a positive and trusting relationship with him or her; stay attuned to your child's emotional state—cues may be subtle
- Trusting relationship may be more easily formed when your child knows what to expect from you; be consistent in your responses to your child and integrate family routines and rituals into your household
- Be understanding of your child's need for "space," but encourage participation in family activities, meals, and outings, as well as social activities, clubs, and/or athletics that your child may have previously participated in or may have talent in
- Give your children opportunities to help their elders, siblings, and peers in areas in which they excel

Strategies for Difficulty with Emotional Perception and Regulation

- Help your child learn to identify his or her feelings by reflecting the feelings back to the child; show your child you are listening and validate what you hear him or her saying
- Help your child learn how to modulate his or her emotions by modeling healthy self-regulation; stay in control of your own feelings
- Assist your child in learning and practicing relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises and muscle relaxation
- Allow your child to carry a small object such as a stress ball or worry stone during family gatherings/outings
- Teach your child appropriate and effective ways to communicate and express feelings

Strategies for Building a Sense of Competency

- Maintain realistic standards while staying attuned to your child so that you do not "push" the child into a "fight or flight" response
- Provide a lot of opportunity for *meaningful* participation in the family and in the community
- Identify and cultivate your child's strengths, talents, and interests and provide lots of positive feedback regarding these
- Provide a lot of encouragement; point out and celebrate your child's accomplishments and successes



Strategies for Impaired Executive Functioning

- Provide your child with written copies of household chores and/or expectations whenever possible
- Provide your child with a self-selected homework space where s/he can feel focused and productive
- Help your child organize projects and break down projects/assignments into manageable parts
- Allow reminders and flexible deadlines for chore/project completion
- Incorporate multiple ways to present information; use visual cues and physical manipulatives when possible
- Prompt your child to use a day planner to keep track of homework; provide support at home each night to make sure your child understands assignments and has all necessary materials
- Allow the child more time to respond to family conversations and activities
- Provide predictability; post the family calendar where it can be easily seen and review it frequently; take the time to make written changes when there is a change in family plans

Strategies for Trauma Related Distress

- Provide simple and honest answers to your child's questions about traumatic events while clarifying distortions and misconceptions
- Allow your child to talk about or act out the trauma and listen actively
- If your child wants to talk about or process the trauma at a time that is inappropriate or impossible, provide the child with a concrete alternative ("I will talk with you about this when you get home from school" or "You have a therapy appointment later today and can talk about it then")
- Avoid being "pulled into" playing a role that re-traumatizes the child (i.e. child may act out trauma in a way that makes you want to yell)
- Establish a family culture characterized by safety and acceptance; model and enforce respectful interactions between family members
- Provide consistent routine wherever possible; anticipate difficult times (i.e. anniversaries, transitions) and provide preventive supports
- Provide your child with opportunities for "self time out" to regroup when they are feeling overwhelmed
- Provide built-in opportunities for the child to talk with a supportive adult who has the time and ability to listen attentively
- Validate the child's experience and feelings; resist the urge to downplay what they tell you in an effort to help them "get over it"
- Be sensitive to cues in the environment that may be triggers for trauma related anxiety and avoid any unnecessary exposure to these potential triggers

Strategies for Behavior Problems

- Develop a coordinated behavior support and management system that emphasizes positive behavioral supports that all family members are familiar with and can utilize
- Be clear about expected behaviors; teach rules and expected behaviors explicitly
- Model respectful, non-violent behavior and relationships
- Address behavioral issues before they are out of control
- Set clear limits for inappropriate behavior and implement logical (not punitive) consequences
- If behavior is a challenge at school as well, discuss the option of a functional behavior assessment to determine behavioral triggers and develop a behavior intervention plan
- Provide your child with many genuine choices to increase sense of self-efficacy and self-control

Important Note for Parents and Guardians: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network suggests that you seek support and consultation routinely for yourself in order to prevent "compassion fatigue," also referred to as "secondary traumatic stress." Be aware that you can develop compassion fatigue from exposure to post trauma reactions of the children in your care.