

Some children, for example, will seem to accept a death but then repeatedly ask when that person is coming back. It is important to be patient and clear when dealing with these questions, for example, it is better to say "John has died" than "John has gone on a journey".



What to look out for

Children and young people experiencing PTSD might show that they think differently either about themselves or other people. They might:

- blame themselves or show lowered self-esteem;
- describe thinking that they are a bad person or talk about thoughts of deserving bad things to happen to them;
- show less trust in other people and be less able to experience a sense of safety;
- experience overwhelming feelings in the form of shame, sadness and fear;
- avoid situations that they fear could increase their emotional response, such as making them feel more frightened, threatened, ashamed or reminded of the event.

What to do

If you have any concerns about your child, it is important to seek help via your GP.

Support available

If you are concerned about a child or young person, contact their GP who can provide support or refer the child or young person to the appropriate service. This could include:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in your local trust
- counselling services

You can also find useful resources on the HSC's Bereavement Network at:

<https://bereaved.hscni.net/bereavement-support/sudden-death/sudden-death/>

Helplines

- Lifeline 0808 808 8000
- Childline 0808 1111
- Barnardo's Child Bereavement Service 028 9066 8333

Useful websites

www.mindingyourhead.info
www.lifelinehelpline.info
www.helplinesni.com
www.cypsp.hscni.net/youth-wellness-web
www.familysupportni.gov.uk

This leaflet contains material adapted from the NHS leaflet *Coping with stress following a major incident*.

 **Public Health Agency**

Public Health Agency
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:



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Supporting a child or young person after a traumatic event

If a child or young person has been involved in, or affected by, a traumatic event, it can impact how they feel, both mentally and physically, and how they behave.

How each child or young person reacts will depend on a number of factors such as their age, whether they were exposed to the event directly, and their previous experience of loss. How those around them are coping can also have an impact, particularly parents, carers and other adults involved in their life.

This leaflet outlines common reactions of children and young people to a traumatic event, how you can support a child or young person and where to go for support.

 **Public Health Agency**

Common reactions after a traumatic event

Some children and young people may have very little reaction following an event, while others may react in a variety of ways immediately or seem okay initially, then react later.

Like adults, some children and young people may experience initial feelings of shock, numbness and denial. They may also feel, sad, angry, worried, frightened or guilty in the days and weeks after the event. Children and young people are resilient and many will be able to recover after a traumatic event with the support of their family and others.



Other typical reactions after a traumatic event include:

- Nightmares.
- Memories or pictures of the event unexpectedly popping into their mind.
- Feeling as if it is actually happening again.
- Playing or drawing about the event time and time again.
- Not wanting to think or talk about the event.
- Avoiding anything that might remind them of the event.
- Getting angry or upset more easily.
- Not being able to concentrate.
- Not being able to sleep.
- Being more jumpy and being on the lookout for danger.
- Becoming more clingy with parents or carers.
- Physical complaints such as stomach aches or headaches.
- Temporarily losing abilities (such as feeding and toileting).
- Problems at school.

These reactions should not usually last beyond four weeks. If symptoms last beyond four weeks, this may indicate Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and it is important to seek help for the child or young person.

How you can help a child or young person after a traumatic event

Children and young people can be very 'in tune' with how those around them are reacting and coping. Making sure you are taking care of yourself and your feelings can have a positive impact. It can be helpful to acknowledge that what happened is very serious, while also recognising that it is a very rare event.

How to help a child or young person

- Try to keep things as normal as possible. Keeping to your usual routine and doing normal activities as much as you can will help your child feel safe more quickly.
- Be available to talk to them as and when they are ready. If it is difficult for you to do this, ask a trusted adult such as a family member or teacher to help.
- Try to help them understand what has happened by giving a truthful explanation that is appropriate for their age. This may help reduce feelings of confusion, anger, sadness and fear. It can also help correct misunderstandings that might, for example, lead the child to feel that they are to blame. It can also help reassure the child that although bad things can happen, they don't need to be scared all the time.
- In the event of a death, particularly a traumatic one, it can be difficult to accept the reality of what has happened. It is important to be patient, simple and honest in response to questions about a death.