

How to support your child after trauma (ages 2 – 5 years)



What you may notice

- New or increased clinginess like following you around the house or not wanting to sleep alone
- New problems with milestones already met like sleeping, eating, going to the bathroom or paying attention – it may seem like they have slipped back (regressed) or act younger
- May not seem to enjoy daily routines or activities they used to like. They may seem more "shut down" or withdrawn
- May be more aggressive to family or friends because they struggle to talk about their feelings
- May be jumpier or startle more easily than before
- May have new fears or have nightmares
- May want to talk about the trauma. You may see things like it in their play or drawings
- Does not seem to feel better after talking about the trauma or asks about the trauma over and over again
- May be scared the trauma will happen again
- Health complaints like stomach aches, headaches, being tired or other symptoms with no clear cause
- May blame themselves or think they caused the trauma

Ways you can support your child

- Increase time with family and friends
- Keep their routine as close to normal as possible
- Find, accept and increase support for yourself to help manage your own shock and feelings
- Stay calm. Listen and let your child talk about the trauma as much as needed
- Let your child know the event is over and they are safe. You may have to tell them over and over again
- Respect your child's fears, and give them time to learn to cope with them
- Protect your child from situations that could remind them of trauma. This may include TV shows, stories, movies, or pictures of the place or physical situations that reference trauma
- Help your child name strong feelings during short talks. Remember that a child of this age cannot talk about these feelings or the trauma for long
- Expect and understand your child may act more like a baby
- Stick to basic household rules

Call your child's doctor if you believe your child needs help right away. If your child is still upset or worried after a few weeks, talk with your child's doctor or school counselor.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.