



Helping children after a traumatic event

Traumatic events can be life threatening or cause serious injury. Some examples include:

- physical or sexual assault
- natural disaster
- war
- a serious accident.

Two thirds of our children will experience at least one of these by 16 years of age.

The experience of trauma may generate strong feelings of fear, sadness, guilt or anger in many children, and they may find it difficult to cope. However, for most children, coping with these events becomes easier after a few weeks. The support of family and friends is very important at this time.

Children's reaction to trauma is often misperceived as them being 'naughty'. But being angry and blaming the child for this behaviour will only make things worse. Here's what to do instead.

- Reassure the child they're safe and cared for.
- When they're ready, listen to and talk with them about their trauma. We're all frightened by things we don't fully understand and talking about it helps.
- Provide special attention, especially at bedtime.
- Encourage them to express their emotions as this is very healing.
- Do fun family activities together.
- Keep family roles clear. Don't give kids too much responsibility but don't be overprotective either. Understand usual things, like going to school, maybe harder. This is why you need to reassure them things will be normal again soon.

For more information

- Talk to your GP.