

## What Can You Do?

### Establish safety and security

- Provide opportunities for children to receive and give positive human physical contact.
- Help children get enough sleep.
- Help children develop protective plans of action for future traumatic events.
- Provide them with physical symbols of love, nurturing, or remembrance.

### Allow children to tell what happened and to talk about death and loss

- Encourage them to tell or develop stories that help them explore intense reactions.
- Talk with them about what they observed from parents, peers, or other adults.

### Predict what will happen and prepare children for the future

- Encourage comforting routines.
- Provide them with tangible comfort items: a photograph of a loved one, a stuffed animal, or a favorite blanket.

### Educate children about trauma

- Help them focus on the future and develop reasons for living.
- Help them to solve the problems they face because of the trauma.
- Address what can and can't be done. Give concrete and factual information.
- Help mitigate other changes in their lives.
- Address estrangement or their removal from peers and friends.

## Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing and processing the event can assist children and loved ones clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, play or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from traumatic experiences.

Children and loved ones can utilize traumatic experiences as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and even protective instinct skills.

## Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



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## Children and Trauma

### Victim Services Unit

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This information on dealing with trauma is provided for you and your family. Please keep in mind that every child reacts individually and the ages presented are a guide.

## Common Responses

### Birth—2 years

High anxiety levels may result in crying, throwing objects, biting, thumb sucking, and agitated behavior.

It is unlikely that the child will retain a strong mental memory of the trauma.

### Pre-School (ages 2 -6)

Time and space is only related to concrete or personal concerns.

The focus for children of this age is on their immediate life, taking in the catastrophe more swiftly than most adults.

They may also believe that what they think about something can cause it to happen.

### School-age children (ages 6-10)

The disruption in routine may cause children to experience a disruption in their own sense of identity and belonging to the world.

Reenactment and play are often used as coping mechanisms.

This is an age when children become more conscious of right and wrong. If they think they have done something wrong to cause what happened they will feel guilt. If they think others have done something wrong, they are likely to feel violent anger. If they cannot comprehend the issues they may distance themselves from any feelings because, "it doesn't matter."

### Early adolescence (10-13 girls, 12-15 boys)

Due to physical changes, children in this age group often talk about physical stress-related symptoms: nausea, headaches, changes in sleep, frequent crying spells, and so on.

The emotional roller-coaster that a child deals with at this age is expressed in wide mood swings.

Children become more preoccupied with friends/peers and begin to distrust or challenge adult interpretations of the world. When they perceive adults have failed them, they may be particularly hostile to the adult world.

Ideals and commitments are viewed as a sacred trust. Betrayal of promises, vows, or relationships is rarely tolerated, even when being faithful to them may be harmful to the children who rely upon them, or when the person making such vows is incapable of honoring them.

Words and symbols mean a great deal to this age group. Stories, plays, poetry, and musical lyrics often act as a basis for expression.

### Adolescence (13-18)

Adolescent behavior is inconsistent. Anger may manifest itself as rage, and sorrow may become suicidal ideation.

Involvement in risk-taking activities may be exacerbated by the loss of risk-inhibitions due to trauma. They often express themselves by acting out and through experimenting with new behaviors.

Most adolescents are creative and energetic. Their creativity is expressed through the creation of their own symbols, activities, and words. Many young people create symbolic activities to remember significant events.

## Coping Methods

Children naturally tend to focus on distress in short time periods and then return to daily activities. They may become overwhelmed with emotions for a while but other things often divert them.

### Seeking and relying upon help from others

Children often gravitate to older children or adults who seem to provide stability and/or comfort. Children may actively identify a surrogate parent in the neighborhood or become especially close to a teacher/religious group leader.

### A sense of a foreshortened future

Many children after surviving trauma cannot conceptualize a long-lasting life. This can be a positive coping skill when it helps them focus on the present. It can be a negative coping skill when they believe that they may, can, or will die in the near future and contribute to that belief through their actions.

### Retreat into fantasy

Children often use fantasy as an escape from reality. At times their fantasies will involve seeing themselves as the savior to the event; at other times they may imagine a loved one appearing as a superhero.

### Education and aspiration

Children often cope well because they view the traumatic event as an event to overcome. School and other activities often provide a welcome relief because they are structured and children know what is expected.

### Spirituality

Children may use a belief in God/other spirits to cope when they feel alone or afraid. When the traumatic event involves death, children may believe that they are communicating with a loved one who has died. This is not a frightening thought to many children but a comfort as they continue to grow and develop.