

Talking To Your Child ABOUT TRAUMA

Trauma means something very scary, dangerous, or life-threatening that happened to someone. When something traumatic happens, it's hard for kids to make sense of it and to find ways to keep moving forward. It's natural for people to want to avoid thinking about things that are traumatic and scary, but eventually it's important to talk about what happened with someone you trust. Here are some things to keep in mind when having these conversations with your child:

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Is my child ready to talk about what happened?



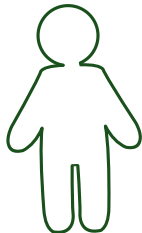
Check for safety:

- Are we in a physically safe environment?
- Has my child expressed comfort talking to me about this topic?
- Do I think I can respond calmly and non-judgmentally to whatever my child needs to share?



Think about timing:

- Is now a good time for us to have this conversation?
- Will my child have time to calm down after we talk about this?
- How long has it been since the trauma happened?
 - Kids may be ready to talk about trauma at different times, but usually if it's only been a few days or weeks since the trauma happened, you'll want to focus on helping your child calm down and feel safe first.



Monitor your child's reactions:

- Does your child show physical signs of distress? (e.g. shaking, muscle tension, lack of eye contact, breathing quickly)
- Does your child show emotional signs of distress? (e.g. seeming dazed or confused, voice trembling, struggling to speak)

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What support will my child need?

Sometimes having a conversation about something traumatic for the first time can be really hard. Make sure you have time and space to take some deep breaths together when you need to and to do something after your talk that is low-stress and easy for you and your child. Plan ahead to take a walk, eat good food, watch a movie, or spend time together doing something else that you both enjoy after you talk - this is a really important part of trauma processing too!

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Starting the conversation

It can be hard to know where to start - here are a few possible questions to get the conversation going with your child!

- I know something scary happened to you. Can you tell me about it?
- Remember when we saw ____? Can you tell me how you felt about that? What did you think when that happened?
- You seem like you are having a hard time the last few days. I wonder if it would help to talk about what is making you feel that way.
- Sometimes it can help to talk about things that feel scary or bad - sharing them with someone means that you don't have to deal with them all by yourself. Are you willing to talk about this with me?
- I know something traumatic happened to you recently. It's important for you to have someone safe that you can talk to about it when you're ready - can we talk about who that person might be?
- I felt scared when ____ happened in our community. I wonder if you did too - can you tell me about it?

Try not to force the conversation, and trust that your child will tell you more when they are ready. You should do your best to **respond calmly and without making judgments** or saying anything like "you should have done ____". The first time your child tells you about their trauma is really important, and once they are able to talk about it more, you can go back and fill in the details. Right now you're just here to **listen to whatever they need to say and to respond with love and support**.

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Continuing the conversation

You'll probably revisit this conversation in the future, and it's okay to follow your child's lead. If you have any concerns or need extra support for you or your child, talk to a trained professional to get some help.

It's common for trauma to pop up again:

- During big transitions & change
- When something reminds your child of the trauma
- When your child feels big emotions
- In nightmares or imaginative play

These can be good times to revisit your conversation with your child and to provide some extra care and support.

