

What is a trauma?

A trauma is a bad experience where you were scared or shocked. You might have gotten hurt or were afraid of getting hurt. Or it could be an experience where someone else you care about got hurt or you were afraid that person would get hurt.

Traumas are: Physical or sexual child abuse, rape, assault, seeing violence at home or in the community, disasters like a fire or an explosion, serious accidents, violent crime, the sudden or violent death of someone you know or care about, or any other experience that caused you to be scared.

You might not know this, but more than half of kids will have some kind of trauma. This means that other kids you know have gone through a trauma. You are not alone.

What are some of the reactions to trauma?

The main reaction is called Posttraumatic Stress (PTS). PTS is caused by trauma reminders.

Trauma reminders are:

1. Memories of what happened.
2. Something that reminds you of the trauma: a trauma reminder can be hearing someone talk about it; a sound or smell; the person or place involved with the trauma, someone who is like the person who did the trauma; TV, songs or movies that mention trauma; or anything else that reminds you of what happened.

Along with PTS, kids can get depressed, be worried in general, or have physical aches and pains.

What is Posttraumatic Stress (PTS)?

PTS can be feelings:

- Being scared, confused, sad, ashamed or angry
- Sleep problems or nightmares
- Concentration problems, being jumpy, nervous, on edge
- Not wanting to be around reminders of the trauma or to be away from close family

PTS can be thoughts:

- Memories of the trauma coming in your mind all the time
- Blaming yourself for what happened
- Thinking you are a bad person because of what happened
- Not trusting people
- Worry that it will happen again

Is PTS normal?

It is normal to have reactions to a trauma. You might have really strong reactions or not so strong reactions. Everyone is different.

When is PTS a problem?

PTS is usually worst right after the trauma and then gets better after a while. After a few weeks or months, most of the time, PTS is not a big problem. When PTS does not get better over time or if it gets worse, then counseling can help.

What helps with PTS?

It helps to know that reactions are normal and usually will get better after a while. The chances are very good that you will get better. Sometimes you can do this on your own or with help from your family; sometimes a counselor can help too.

Tips to help with the reactions:

- Remind yourself that the trauma is over and you are not in danger now
- Tell yourself you did the best you could in the situation
- Learn about your trauma reminders so you can be ready to handle them
- Practice stopping and calming down when you have reactions
- Try not to avoid reminders or situations as long as they are safe
- Let your family know what they can do to help you feel safe and be safe

★ If you are still in a situation that is scary or possibly dangerous, make a safety plan for what to do in case of trouble. Get a family member or counselor to help with the plan.

What is counseling for PTS?

Counseling is talking to a professional who is an expert in helping in kids like you get over the reactions to the trauma. The counselor works with you and your family (whatever family you are living with) to teach ways to handle reactions. The counselor helps you become an expert in your trauma reactions and how to handle them in a helpful way.

How long does counseling last?

How long it lasts depends on how you are doing. It can be a few sessions or it can be a few months. What is most important is that the counselor has special training to help kids who have been through trauma. Check your counselor out!

Long term effects of trauma.

No one forgets that they went through a trauma. It is always a bad experience that you had. You might have some permanent changes because you went through a trauma. But not all of the changes are for the bad. Sometimes you learn how much you can handle and that you are a stronger person because of it. Maybe you will be more prepared than other kids for handling situations that could be dangerous or scary. You may be able to help other kids if they go through a trauma. Try to think about what you have learned and how you are better prepared to handle bad experiences.

What else do I need to know?

Ask for help if you are having a hard time with your trauma reactions, there is always someone who can help.

You have a really good chance of getting over the trauma, especially if you can get the support and help you need. A lot of kids have done it, so can you.