

## Parenting Tips when Your Child or Youth has Experienced Trauma

Parents want to protect their children from having bad or scary experiences. Unfortunately many children and youth have such experiences during childhood. These experiences are called trauma. Trauma can be sexual or physical child abuse, witnessing domestic or community violence, being raped or attacked, being the victim of a violent crime, being in a very serious accident or disaster or any other scary experience.

Parents can make a very big difference in the child or youth's recovery. Below are some tips for what you can do when your child or youth has had a trauma or you find out your child or youth has had a trauma.

**SAFETY FIRST.** Take any necessary steps to make sure your child/youth and the family is safe. Make sure to get medical help if your child/youth needs it. If what happened was a crime, make a report.

- For you: Take care of *your own reactions*. It can be very upsetting to find out about your child/youth's trauma for many reasons. It is sometimes shocking or hard to believe. It can cause worry about how the child/youth's life will turn out. There may be effects on the whole family or others. Sometimes systems get involved and that can be stressful. Make a point to use coping skills and supports, especially those that have worked before.
- Give your child/youth *extra reassurance and support*. Experiencing a trauma or telling about one is stressful. It can lower stress to let the child/youth know it will be OK, that you will help them, and that they are safe now. If needed make a specific safety plan.
- *Stick to usual routines* as much as possible. Even during a stressful time children/youth do best when there is structure and predictability. Such things as going to school, doing usual chores and expectations, keeping a regular bedtime can help the child/youth get back on track. Allowing a little slack is fine, but making too many exceptions can lead to trouble.
- *Keep the door open for the child/youth to talk* about their thoughts, feelings, and reactions especially any fears or worries about the trauma or what happens next. It is important to give the message that you are available and can handle talking about it. It can delay recovery when the topic is totally avoided.
- Get help from a specialist who knows about child/youth trauma. Specialists can give you information about trauma and its impact, coping skills to get through a hard time, guidance on whether your child/youth needs trauma-focused or other therapy, and what you can do to help with recovery.

Going through a trauma and its aftermath, and learning that it can be handled is an important learning experience for children and their parents. Finding strengths can come out of a bad experience. Nothing can change what has happened and children, youth and families are usually affected in some way by a trauma. However, most of the time children who have had a trauma will grow up and live a good life. What parents do in supporting their children can make all the difference.