

PTSD in Children and Teens

Children and teens can also develop PTSD, however; the symptoms may look a little different.

Young children may regress (e.g. start wetting the bed again when they were previously toilet-trained), act out the traumatic events during play, or be clingy or afraid to separate from a parent.

Adolescents' symptoms can appear similar to adults'. They may also develop disruptive, disrespectful, or destructive behaviors. Older children and teens may feel guilty for not preventing an injury or death. They may also have thoughts of revenge.

Here are some ways parents and caregivers can support children and youth after a trauma:

- **Let them know they are safe now.** Children and adolescents may need extra assurance.
- **Allow them to talk about the experience and their emotions if they want to.** Let them know that being scared is normal. Allow them to draw how they are feeling if they do not want to talk about it.
- **Go back to their daily routine.** Help them to get adequate sleep, eat meals at regular times, and engage in activities they enjoy.
- **Increase time with friends and family.** Children and adults who spend extra time with friends and family tend to do better after an upsetting event.
- **Take care of your own feelings.** Caregivers are better able to support children and adolescents when they have the support they need.

About Urban Alliance

Urban Alliance is a Christian collective impact organization located in East Hartford, CT. Our goal is to create opportunities for people to achieve lasting change in their lives through the collaborative work of churches and organizations in our local community.

Your support helps mental health resources, like this brochure, get into the hands of the people who need them most.



urbanalliance.com



Trauma & PTSD



Have you or someone you know experienced...

- Sexual assault
- Unexpected or untimely death of a loved one
 - Assault
 - Abuse
- A serious car accident
- A natural disaster or house fire

These are examples of traumatic events. Trauma is defined as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence. It can be directly experienced, witnessed or indirect by hearing about a relative or close friend who has experienced a traumatic event. If you have experienced trauma, you are not alone and help is available.

Understanding PTSD

After experiencing a trauma, it is normal to have upsetting memories, have trouble thinking clearly or sleeping, or feel on edge, sad, afraid, angry or numb. If you don't feel better after a few weeks or are unable to move on from the event for a prolonged period of time, you may be experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Symptoms include:

1. **Reliving the event:** You might find that you have intrusive memories or thoughts, nightmares or flashbacks
2. **Avoiding reminders:** You may try to avoid memories of the event by avoiding people, places or situations related to the event.
3. **Negative thoughts and emotions:** You may feel sad, angry, guilty, ashamed, or afraid much of the time.
4. **Feeling jumpy or on edge:** You may feel on edge and irritable.

If you are experiencing these symptoms after a traumatic event, consult with a doctor or professional counselor to determine if you have PTSD.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Approximately 5% of Americans – more than 13 million people – have PTSD at any given time.
- An estimated 70% of adults in the United States have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime.
- Up to 20% of these people go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

Recovering After Trauma

It takes time to recover. The following tips can help you recover and cope after a trauma:

- **Build in support.** The simple act of talking face-to-face with another person can help you feel more calm and connected. Support can take the form of seeing or interacting with a friend, family, pastors or clergy, meeting with a support group or prayer ministry, or seeking professional support from a counselor or psychiatrist. Consider looking for counselors with training in trauma interventions such as EMDR and CBT.
- **Recognize triggers.** Triggers are people, places, or situations that remind you of the trauma and cause you to experience thoughts, feelings, or memories associated with the trauma. It is important to identify your triggers so you are able to cope more effectively.
- **Take care of your body.** Make sure to eat a well-balanced healthy diet, exercise, and get plenty of rest. Self-care can improve your mood and your ability to cope with stress.
- **Express feelings.** People who experience a trauma often have a number of difficult emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, shame or helplessness. It is important to acknowledge these emotions and find healthy outlets for them, such as talking to a friend, journaling, or exercising.
- **Find ways to relax.** When a person experiences a trauma they often feel on edge or jumpy. It is important to find ways to relax your body such as taking a walk, taking a warm shower, praying, reading the Bible, exercising, practicing progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, or singing.
- **Re-establish a routine.** There is comfort in the familiar. After a trauma, getting back to your normal routine as much as possible will help you minimize stress.

- **Challenge feelings of helplessness.** People who have experienced trauma often feel afraid and helpless. You can challenge these thoughts with truth about who God is and positive action. Because God is in control and present with us in times of trouble, we are never truly helpless. Additionally, positive actions such as volunteering, helping a person in need, or small acts of kindness can help you overcome feelings of fear, helplessness, and hopelessness.
- **Recognize the impact of developmental trauma.** Developmental trauma (e.g. childhood abuse, neglect, traumatic loss or chronic stress) can have a long lasting impact. This type of trauma can impact the way you view yourself and the world around you. Counseling is often a helpful part of a person's healing journey when the trauma occurred early in life.
- **Look to God for comfort.** Jesus experienced trauma when he died on the cross, and has a deep compassion because he understands the pain of trauma. It is important to remember that God comforts and promises to be with us during times of suffering. God offers His presence to help people heal and experience peace (e.g. Philippians 4:6-7, Psalm 23:4, Psalm 34:17-18).

Helpful Scripture

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 13:1-5)

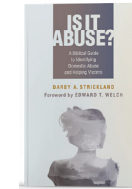
"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." (Psalms 34:18)

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Helpful Resources



Norman Wright
When the Past Won't Let You Go: Find the Healing That Helps You Move On (Christian perspective)



Darby Strickland
Is It Abuse?: A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims (Christian perspective)



Bessel van der Kolk M.D.
The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma



Nadine Burke Harris M.D.
The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity

Building a Network of Support

Most people need extra support after a traumatic event.

Friends, family, pastors, care ministries and support groups can offer practical, emotional and spiritual support. It is also important to talk to your primary care physician as well as a professional counselor if you are struggling to cope.

Find a Counselor

- **Charisnetworkct.org** offers a listing of CT professional Christian counselors.
- **Psychologytoday.com** offers a general listing of professional counselors.
- **Urbanalliance.com/help** offers a listing of CT behavioral health providers by county.



Charis Website

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

- **Safe Connect**, Connecticut's domestic violence information and resource hub, is the entry point for domestic violence services in Connecticut. You can connect with Safe Connect advocates 24/7 in the way that is safest for you. Call or text **1.888.774.2900** or email safeconnect@ctcadv.org.
- The **Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence's** statewide hotline, will connect you to counselors and advocates who are available 24-hours a day, seven days a week to listen and offer support. Dial **1.888.999.5545** (English) or **1.888.568.8332**, (Spanish)

Immediate Support

- **Mobile crisis teams** visit people in their homes or in the community for crisis situations. **Dial 211** and ask for Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services.
- **National Suicide Hot line: Dial 988** for support
- If you or a loved one are not safe, **call 911 immediately** or visit the nearest emergency room.