

What can I do to help?

You can never protect your children from all the bad things in life, however you can help them to deal with these experiences.

There are a number of things you can do to help your child cope with traumatic experiences:

- ensure that your child feels safe
- let your child know you are there for him or her by offering support whenever he or she needs it
- don't force your child to talk if they aren't comfortable; let your child talk to you when he or she is ready
- don't be afraid to talk about the experience and try to explain what happened
- use language your child can understand and provide him or her with honest answers
- be prepared to talk about the experience more than once
- ensure your child realises he or she is not to blame for what has happened
- be patient if your child is easily upset
- try to keep your child in his or her usual routine as much as possible
- make sure that brothers and sisters know what happened
- let your child's teachers and other significant adults know what has happened.



Who can I contact?

If you are concerned about your child, it may be useful to contact :

- your general practitioner
- a paediatrician
- a psychologist
- your local community health centre.

If you feel that your child's situation is urgent and you live in the Western Metropolitan Region, you may consider contacting the:

- **Royal Children's Hospital
Mental Health Service**
Intake Service on **1800 44 55 11**
between 9.00am - 5.00pm,
Monday to Friday



post traumatic stress

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Most children will experience or hear about stressful situations that may affect them emotionally and physically. These experiences may be frightening or overwhelming for some children. In most situations, children recover quickly and experience no ongoing problems. Some children may react immediately, whilst others may not react for months or even years.

There are a number of factors that can affect the impact of a situation or trauma on the child. These include the seriousness of the event, the level of the child's involvement, the child's relationship to those involved and the amount of pain and suffering that results.

What can contribute to post-traumatic stress disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop in children and adolescents who have been exposed to a life threatening experience, such as a major accident, burglary, or sudden death. It has been known for some time that PTSD could follow a major natural disaster, or mass life-threatening event such as a ferry capsizing or the impact of war. The vast majority of children recover without serious consequences. It is now recognized that PTSD can also develop in children who have been emotionally, physically, and/or sexually abused, or exposed to domestic violence.

There are certain factors that may contribute to a child developing post-traumatic stress, these include:

- the degree of pain or life threatening physical trauma
- previous problems with anxiety or depression
- how you react to the situation and your own level of distress
- past situations where the child has not felt safe
- how frequently the child has experienced stressful situations.

How do I know what to look for?

Children's reactions to a traumatic event will be individual and unique, and they will recover at their own rate. The following symptoms are common in the first few weeks after exposure to a traumatic event:

- memories of the event coming back - "flashbacks"
- being preoccupied with what happened
- nightmares and upsetting dreams
- getting upset when they are reminded of the experience
- becoming upset when they do anything that is linked to the experience (for example, getting back in the car after being in an accident)
- not responding to situations or seeming to be in a daze

- becoming irritable or angry easily
- being extra sensitive and easily surprised
- not being able to enjoy normal activities
- believing that the worst is going to happen
- fearful of being separated from parents.

If after four to six weeks, your child is still experiencing these symptoms, it may be advisable to ask for professional help

How can I look after myself?

Caring for a child with post-traumatic stress disorder can often lead to feelings that can be overwhelming such as anger, guilt or sadness. These may be normal responses to the stress that you are experiencing. It is important that you have enough support from family and friends to help.

By looking after yourself, you will be better able to look after the special needs of your child.

Dealing with a child who has post-traumatic stress disorder can often have an effect on other parts of your life. For example, it can put a strain on your relationships with other family members. Counselling may be helpful in working through some of these issues. Sorting out these problems will also help your child.

