

## Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Education for Caregivers

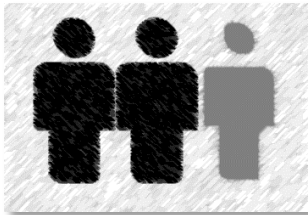
Caregivers want to protect their children from having bad or scary experiences. Unfortunately, many children and youth have such experiences during childhood. *Trauma* is an incident experienced by a person with a real or perceived danger or threat. Trauma can be a specific event (physical or sexual assault, robbery, natural disaster, witnessing a death, a scary experience) or occur from exposure to multiple events over time (ongoing violence/abuse, lack of access to basic needs, bullying, neglect, ongoing racial injustice and murders of BIPOC community members, harassment due to sexual/gender identity, COVID-19). *Posttraumatic Stress (PTS)* are the reactions to trauma. These reactions are caused by the memory of the trauma, the feelings connected to the memories/reminders, and how the person makes sense of trauma. It is normal to have reactions to a trauma. PTS typically gradually gets better with time. When PTS does not get better or gets worse, it may be necessary to get additional support.



### EVERYONE HAS BAD EXPERIENCES. A POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER IS DETERMINED BY:

1. **SEVERITY** – event is re-experienced through memories and impacts physical, psychological, and behavior
2. **DURATION** – symptoms last for more than 1 month
3. **INTERFERING WITH THE PERSON’S STUDIES, ACTIVITIES, AND FAMILY/SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

Physical	Psychological	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficulty sleeping/sleeping during class</li><li>• Difficulty concentrating</li><li>• Heightened startle reaction</li><li>• Hyper-aware of environment</li><li>• Delays in physical, language or other milestones</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unwanted upsetting memories</li><li>• Nightmares</li><li>• Flashbacks</li><li>• Emotional distress after reminders</li><li>• Negative thoughts about self and world</li><li>• Feeling isolated</li><li>• Difficulty experiencing positive feelings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoidance of situations, people or things that remind youth of trauma</li><li>• Exaggerated blame of self or others for causing trauma</li><li>• Risky or destructive behavior</li><li>• Negative mood</li><li>• Anger/Irritable outbursts without a known reason</li><li>• Worrying it will happen again</li><li>• Not trusting others</li></ul>



Two out of three youth will experience a trauma

## How we can support youth:

1. **Give reassurance and listen non-judgmentally**
  - Let youth know it's normal to have many feelings after a traumatic experience. Let them talk about how they're feeling, why they think these acts happened, and what they think should be done. Answer questions in simple and honest ways. Reassure them what happened was not their fault.
2. **Try to keep routines and make the youth's environment feel predictable and safe as possible**
  - Developing regular routines for meals, activities, and bedtime can help youth know what to anticipate in their day and help alleviate feelings of anxiousness/nervousness. Preparing youth in advance for changes or new experience can decrease their perceptions of lack of control. Review ways with your child on what makes them feel safe and create plans they can follow when they do not feel safe.
3. **Help children face up to non-dangerous situations to learn they can handle them**
  - Identify people, places, topics, or things that may be reminders of the trauma but are not in themselves dangerous. Support youth in approaching, not avoiding, these non-dangerous reminders. This can help them learn the difference between danger and non-dangerous reminders.
4. **Promote healthy coping skills and utilizing positive relationships**
  - Practice coping skills such as relaxation, breathing, distraction (listening to a favorite song, playing games), or meditating with your child. Help prompt them to use the coping skills when they seem to be getting anxious or worried unnecessarily. Promote checking in with trusted adults or peers for additional comfort.

**Additional supports shown to be effective:** Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Mindfulness

Caregiver toolkit for additional education, tools, and practices for trauma sensitivity: <https://srhd.org/1-2-3-care-toolkit>