



Safety Net Guide

TRU Healing Solutions Safety Net Trauma Recovery Resource Guide

Transforming, Restoring, Uniting

TRU Healing Solutions mission is to build equitable, just, and connected communities by promoting trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices. They aim to educate and equip individuals and organizations with tools to understand and address trauma, while expanding community-based support systems and advocating for policies that foster resilience, wellness, and justice.

What is a traumatic event?

Any event in which a person is exposed to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence has the potential to be traumatic.

Exposure to such events can occur in different ways:

Children aged 6 years or younger:

- directly experience the event
- witness, in person, the event as it occurs to others,
- especially primary caregivers
- learn that the event occurred to a parent or caregiver

Children/adolescents older than 6 years:

- directly experience the event
- witness, in person, the event as it occurs to others,
- especially primary caregivers
- learn that the event occurred to a close family member
- or close friend

These types of events are relatively common; by the age of 16 years more than two thirds of children will have experienced at least one.

Not all young people exposed to such events will develop significant psychological problems, therefore the preferred term is *potentially traumatic events* (PTE). Many young people will recover with the help of good family and social support, but between 10-30% of young people may go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or another mental health problem.

Most people, when something bad happens to them, try to avoid thinking about it or talking about it, as it makes them feel uncomfortable and upset. But it is this avoidance that keeps the person always on edge and stops the mind from being able to process the memory and pack it safely away.

“Our Role is to Help People Seek and Ask for Help”

Common Problems

Common emotional and behavioral problems that may develop in children and adolescents who have experienced a traumatic event include:

All Ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● sleep problems● irritability, anger, aggression● concentration and memory problems● hyper-alertness● depression● general anxiety● separation anxiety● development of specific trauma-related fears● (the link may not always be obvious)
Preschool-aged children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● temper tantrums● difficult and challenging behavior● regression in or loss of previously mastered developmental skills (e.g., speech, toileting)● new fears which are not associated with the traumatic event (e.g., fear of going to the bathroom alone)
School-aged children/adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● new awareness of own mortality (that they can die)● survivor guilt● substance use● Increased aggression/aggressive behaviors

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

If trauma isn't properly 'dealt with' – it can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a set of reactions that can develop in some people after they have been through a traumatic event.

There are four main types of symptoms:

Re-living the traumatic event through unwanted memories, vivid nightmares, flashbacks, or intense reactions such as heart palpitations or panic when reminded of the event. Children under six years of age may engage in repetitive play that re-enacts the event.

Feeling wound up – having trouble sleeping or concentrating, feeling angry or irritable, taking risks, being easily startled or constantly on the lookout for danger. In children under six years, this may involve verbal or physical aggression towards people or objects, or increased temper tantrums.

Avoiding reminders of the event such as activities, places, people, thoughts or feelings that bring back memories of the trauma.

Having negative thoughts and feelings such as fear, anger, guilt, or feeling flat or numb a lot of the time. Loss of interest in day-to-day activities and feeling cut off from friends and family can also occur. Children under six years of age may become socially withdrawn and less interested in play; they may become more serious, laugh less and appear sad or down.

PTSD presents can exacerbate (*make bigger*) other mental health needs.

Preschool-aged children

- oppositional defiant disorder
- separation anxiety disorder
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- major depression

Primary school-aged children

- anxiety disorders
- major depression
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- specific phobia (s)

Adolescents

- anxiety disorders
- major depression
- suicidal thoughts or self-harm
- substance dependence
- specific phobia (s)

Don't wait until a 'small symptom' /can become a 'big problem.

(When something doesn't feel right check it out)

Strategies to Help Children/Teens

If you have concerns about a child's recovery, the first thing you should do is sit down and talk to them about how they are feeling. (Keep talking and don't be afraid to ask questions)

Encourage them to talk openly about how they have been feeling since the trauma. Try to get an idea about any worries they may have or difficulties they are experiencing. Provide comfort and support and let them know that lots of people struggle with unwanted thoughts, feelings and memories after a traumatic event. But also let them know that there is help available.

Take your child to and have them speak to their doctor or a mental health professional about what's troubling them.

If your child's doctor is concerned that your child may be suffering from PTSD or another trauma-related problem, he or she can arrange for a referral to a child and adolescent counselor who specializes in helping children who have been affected by a traumatic event (s).

The counselor might be a psychologist, a social worker, a mental health nurse, a psychiatrist or another type of mental health worker.

Usually the counselor will begin with a thorough assessment of your child's behavior and emotions. This will involve speaking to you and your child, and perhaps other family members as well as your child's teachers. The counselor will also want to know how other family members are coping.

The counselor should explain the diagnosis and the treatment options available to you and your child in words that you both understand, so that you are informed about how and why a treatment can work, and feel ready to participate in it.

When Choosing a Counselor Ask:

- **Ask to see their qualifications and ask if they have had extra training in working with children and adolescents, and particularly in trauma-focused therapy for children and adolescents.**
- **Ask if you will be involved in your child's counseling sessions. (It is usual for the parents to be involved in at least some of the sessions so that they can help the child implement some of the strategies at home and support through the therapy process.)**
- **Once the counselor has made a diagnosis, ask if you and your child will be involved in deciding on the best treatment plan. It is important that you are both actively involved in**

deciding what will work best.

What strategies help heal trauma?

The Best Treatments

1. **Maximize the youth's sense of safety (help your child learn how to feel more safe)**
2. **Assist youth in reducing overwhelming emotion (help your child manage any overwhelming feelings that might 'come up.')**
3. **Help youth make new meaning of their trauma history and current experiences**
4. **Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the youth's behavior, development, and relationships (help you and your child understand trauma and it's impact on how you feel, think, & behave)**
5. **Coordinate with other service providers (to reduce the burden on you and your child/ and to make sure you're getting the right 'service/supports')**
6. **Utilize comprehensive assessment of the youth's trauma experiences and their impact on the youth's development and behavior to guide services**
7. **Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the youth**
8. **Provide support and guidance to the youth's family/caregivers**
9. **Help caregivers manage their work and personal stress**

PTSD presents can exacerbate (*make bigger*) other mental health needs.

TF-CBT (Trauma Informed – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)	<p>Designed to reduce negative emotional and behavioral responses, and to correct maladaptive beliefs and attributions related to the abusive experiences</p> <p>Aims to provide support and skills to help non-offending parents cope effectively with their own</p>
SPARCS (Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents with Chronic Stress)	<p>Group therapy for adolescents with present or past exposure to chronic trauma -designed to improve functioning in multiple areas</p>
Prolonged Exposure Therapy for Adolescents	<p>A hands on therapy that gradually exposes a youth to what they are afraid of and helps them learn how to cope with the exposure.</p>
Parent- Child Psychotherapy	<p>For children 0-5 to strengthen the parent/child bond, attachment and to increase a feeling of safety for children</p>
Seeking Safety for Adolescents	<p>A present focused treatment for teens who use substance and have been exposed to trauma</p>
Brief Strategic Family Therapy	<p>A short-term family therapy model focused on a specific need and to improve parent/child relationships</p>
Community Based Comprehensive Case Management	<p>Provides coordinated support across multiple systems (education, mental health, child welfare, etc.) to meet the complex needs of youth and families—often referred to as “Wraparound” services. Focuses on building a team of natural and professional supports to help families reach their goals.</p>
Medications	<p>Can sometimes be helpful but should always be used with other supports</p>

Recovery Should Also Build Resiliency - Some Activities Could Be:

- Finding positive things for your child to do (games, spending time with grandparents, volunteering, gardening)
- Encouraging reading, involvement in sports, and/or the arts
- Getting involved with a community group and/or a spiritual group
- Finding a mentor (or positive adults) who can support your child
- Keeping them involved in things that build upon the in their interest & talents

- **Getting involved in your neighborhood/and work**
- **Practicing your own self care**

Things You Can Do At Home – Start Now?

Step 1: Provide support and acceptance

Remember: *This is the first and most important step in helping your child manage his or her PTSD. Your child needs your love, support, and acceptance more than anything else! If your child feels accepted and understood by you, he or she may not develop PTSD, even after a serious trauma.*

- Not all children and teens who experience a trauma will develop PTSD. If your child feels supported by the family afterward, he or she is less likely to have PTSD symptoms later on. So, as a first step, you can help your child by providing **lots of love and support**.
- As a parent having your child experience a trauma can also be very difficult for you. For example, you might blame yourself, and believe that you did not “protect” your child enough. Your first instinct might even be to leave your child alone for a bit and give him or her time and space alone to deal with what happened. However, children can misinterpret this to mean that you somehow blame them for what happened.

Tip #1: Be an active listener!

Encourage your child to talk to you about what happened and any feelings he or she might have about the event. This can be an important part of your child’s recovery. For younger children who might have difficulty or be unable to talk about a trauma, encourage them to draw a picture or story about what happened.

Tip #2:

Remind your child that it was not his or her fault, and provide lots of love!

Step 2: Teaching your child about anxiety & PTSD

- No matter what type of anxiety problem your child is struggling with, it is important that he or she understands the **facts about anxiety**.

Fact 1: Anxiety is a normal and adaptive system in the body that tells us when we are in danger.

Fact 2: Anxiety becomes a problem when our body tells us that there is danger when there is no real danger. Children and youth who have been traumatized often over-predict danger in future situations, when there is none.

- As an important first step, help your child to understand that all the worries and physical feelings have a name: **Anxiety**. This is especially important for children with PTSD, since the many symptoms of PTSD can feel very frightening.
 - Because PTSD can include very scary symptoms (such as nightmares, flashbacks, or vivid memories of the trauma), your child may be worried that he or she is going “crazy”. Take the time to explain that all these scary feelings are part of PTSD. Your child also needs to know that he or she is normal. The problem is **not** that your child is crazy! Rather, your child has anxiety, and there are skills that he or she can learn to deal with that anxiety.
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Step 3: Building your child’s toolbox

Tool #1:

Learning to calm anxiety by slowing down your breathing (see [Teaching Your Child Calm Breathing](#)).

Tool #2:

Learning how to calm your anxiety by relaxing the muscles in your body (see [How to Do Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#).)

Children with PTSD are often very tense and jumpy throughout the day. Learning how to do relaxation can help them to reduce some of those anxious feelings in the body.

Tool #3: Getting Back to Routines

As a parent, it is important that you have your child return to normal activities as soon as possible after a traumatic event. Although it is normal to want to allow your child time alone, this is actually not helpful! Following a trauma, your child should be back in school within a few days (if possible), and continuing with his or her usual routine. This includes getting up and going to bed at the usual times, and participating in school or community activities (for example, sports teams, hobbies, visiting with friends).

Tool #4: Facing Fears

After your child has experienced a trauma, it will be your natural tendency to want to protect your child from any danger. Sometimes, however, this can become “overprotection”. By trying to protect your child, you might accidentally encourage or support his or her avoidance behavior. For example, your child might not want to get into a car (or even see a car) after having been in a car accident, and you as a parent might support your child in this decision, and not have him or her near any cars. Although this reaction is understandable, your child’s avoidance will not go away on its own. In fact, if your child is afraid of getting into cars today, this fear could get worse over time, and he or she might end up being afraid to even leave the house.

How You Can Help:

The best way to help your child is to encourage him or her to face the fear, rather than avoid it. That is, if your child is afraid to go to school, be around friends, be in crowds, go to shopping malls, or be in a car, then you can help to reduce that fear. Sometime exposure can help your child gradually approach fearful situations. This should be done gradually, and with lots of praise and reward after each attempt.

Tool #5: Integrating Pleasant Events

- Since many children and teens with PTSD start to isolate themselves and avoid being around others, you can help to get back to normal routine by scheduling pleasant events into his or her life. (*promote play!!!*)

Hint:

Your child should always be involved in the decision of what pleasant things to do, and it is important that whatever you do, it is truly pleasant. In other words, there can be no reminders of the trauma when having fun. (it’s helpful let your child feel like they have ‘some control’ over their lives and what happens to them.)

Some examples of pleasant events might be:

- *Going/ renting a movie; going to zoo, a farm or someplace different & relaxing.*
- *Playing games together, having a family night.*
- *Playing in the park.*
- *Visiting over at a friend’s house or grandparents/family member’s.*
- *Playing sports.*
- *Going bike riding.*
- *Going to the pool.*
- *Reading together or listening to music together.*

As a final point:

Although all of these tools can be very effective in helping you to manage your child’s anxiety, sometimes it is not enough. Sometimes children and teens have very severe PTSD, and despite all

your best efforts, he or she might still be struggling daily with anxiety symptoms. If this is the case, seek some professional help through a consult with your GP, psychiatrist, or a child psychologist/mental health worker.

Step 5: Building on Bravery

Your child's progress comes from hard work. If you are noticing improvements, both you and your child deserve credit! Learning to overcome anxiety is like exercise – your child needs to "keep in shape" and practice his or her skills regularly, and make them a habit. This is true even after your child is feeling better and has reached his or her goals.

Don't be discouraged if your child has lapses and returns to old behaviors every once in a while, especially during stressful times or transitions. This is normal, and just means that one or two tools in the toolbox need to be practiced again. Remember, coping with anxiety is a lifelong process.

Hint:

Occasionally, remind your child what he or she was not able to do before learning how to cope with anxiety and face fears. It can be very encouraging for your child to see how far he or she has come!

Anxiety and Relaxation Tips for you and your child(ren)

Here are some simple strategies that you can teach your child to use to calm themselves when they are feeling upset.

1. Talk about my problem with a friend or trusted adult
2. Hang-out with my friends
3. Listen to my favorite music
4. Ask a trusted adult or a friend for a hug
5. Do some exercise with a friend or family member
(running, dancing to music, riding my bike, going for a walk)
6. Make something by drawing, painting, sewing, knitting or cooking
7. Have a warm bath
8. Do a quick relaxation exercise
9. Write in my diary
10. Use positive self-talk

Positive self-talk

- Sometimes the thoughts in our heads make us feel happy, but sometimes they
- Can makes us feel sad, angry, worried or stressed. Positive self-talk helps to

- Chase these unhelpful thoughts away so we can feel less stressed. If you are
- Thinking about something horrible that happened, or are worried that something
- Awful might happen, try using positive self-talk to make you feel better.
- *I am safe now.*
- *I was strong to survive that.*
- *I have people who can help me.*
- *I have done a lot of things well before - I'm sure I can again!*

Quick relaxation exercises

Calm breathing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sit in a chair or lie on the floor 2. Take a breath in through your nose and count to 3 and imagine a soothing color 3. Breathe out through your mouth and say the word 'calm' to yourself 4. Repeat this 10 times
Imagine a happy place	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Imagine a calm and happy place 2. Tell yourself what you can see, hear, smell and feel in this happy place 3. Practice your calm breathing whilst you are picturing your happy place
Quick muscle relaxation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold your arms above your head – feel the tension in them – now drop your arms down by your side and feel them relax 2. Practice tensing and then relaxing muscles in your hands, legs, face, and stomach, and wherever else you feel stress

Help your child to select a few things from these lists and try them out.

Where can I find more information?

24 Hour Crisis Resources

Dial- Illinois (2-1-1) ~ Resources and Information

Community Elements Crisis Line ~217-359-4141

The Crosspoint Crisis Hotline (CARES Line)

217-443-5566 or 1-888-549-1800

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>	<u>Other Notes</u>
Carle Child Diagnostic Center	217- 365-6214	Comprehensive screening, diagnosis, and assessments
Community Elements	217-398-8080	Counseling, linkage and engagement & trauma informed treatments
Creative Solutions Counseling Group	(217) 203-2030	Professional mental health therapy/counseling
Community Resource & Counseling Services	217-379-4302	Therapy, counseling, mental health assessments
Family & Youth Alliance	217-898-8777	Parent & youth peer support, advocacy, & support activities
Francis Nelson	217-356-1558	Counseling and mental health supports
The Pavilion	217-373-1700	Trauma informed screening, assessments/intensive supports
Prairie Center	217-328-4500	Substance abuse treatment services adults and teens/ and trauma informed treatments
Psychological Services Center	217-333-0041	Psychological services, family counseling and trauma informed treatments
RPC – Youth Assessment Center	217-239-5933	Early intervention services for at-risk youth. Offers assesments, counseling support, and resources

Online Resources:

www.aftertheinjury.org (helpful online resource with a lot of information and an online assessment quiz parents can take and a guide to create your personalized care plan)

<https://sesameworkshop.org/resources/helping-kids-grieve/> - **Sesame Street Guide to Help Children Grieve**

<http://www.youthinmind.info/py/yiminfo/Start.py?language=euk&country=usa> - **Youth in Mind** – online resources and assessments for teens, parents, and community supports. (for all ages)

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/ptsdcoachonline/tools_menu.htm - **PTSD Coach Online Tools** - (there is also an app)

<http://www.griefspeaks.com/id89.html> - **Grief Speaks** - a guide to help teens deal with grief

<http://www.nctsnet.org> - **National Center for Child Traumatic Stress** – comprehensive resource for parents, youth, educators – includes information about best practices

<http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/teens/> – **Dougy Center – Grief Support for Teens**: Offers age-specific resources, peer support information, and articles to help teens navigate grief after a loss.

<https://childmind.org/topics/trauma-grief/> – **Child Mind Institute – Trauma & Grief Resources**: A trusted site with articles, videos, and guides for parents, caregivers, and educators on how to support children through trauma and grief.

<https://www.griefshare.org/> – **GriefShare**: A network of support groups and online tools for people grieving the death of a loved one, including videos, discussion guides, and a searchable group directory.