

# PTSD in Children: Symptoms and Treatment

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## Quick Guide to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

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### What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

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Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can affect kids who have experienced something very upsetting. They have extreme anxiety that causes issues like trouble sleeping, being easily annoyed, or feeling detached from others.

Experiences that might be traumatic include violence, abuse, natural disasters, or bad accidents. Kids with PTSD might have experienced the upsetting event themselves. *PTSD*

#### **PTSD**

see post-traumatic stress disorder

can also happen if the child sees it happen to someone else or hears about it happening to someone they're close to. It's normal for kids to be upset when something traumatic happens. The difference is that kids with PTSD are still very anxious months later.

PTSD isn't common in young people, but both children and teenagers can experience it. Getting a lot of support right after the upsetting event can help them avoid developing PTSD.

## **What are the symptoms of PTSD?**

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Signs of PTSD in children may show up after a child experiences something very upsetting. Sometimes, they don't show up until months or years later. PTSD causes changes in behavior that could include:

- Trouble sleeping
- A lot of nightmares about the event
- Feeling numb or separate from other people
- Getting annoyed quickly
- Trouble focusing
- Headaches or stomachaches
- Acting out the upsetting event during playtime

Young children may start wetting the bed again, stop speaking, or be afraid of leaving their parents. Teens may feel guilty and try to hurt themselves.

## **How is PTSD diagnosed?**

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To be diagnosed with PTSD, the child must have seen, heard about or been a part of an upsetting or dangerous event. Then they have to show signs of extreme anxiety. These signs are grouped into three categories:

- Thinking about, dreaming about, or acting out the event
- Feeling numb, trouble focusing, and trouble connecting with people

Getting annoyed easily, acting fearful, or having trouble sleeping

The symptoms must continue for at least a few months after the event. That's because it's normal for a child to be upset soon after something bad happens. The symptoms may also start months or years later.

## **How is PTSD treated?**

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PTSD in children is often treated with both therapy and medication.

The two most common kinds of therapy for kids with PTSD are psychotherapy and *cognitive*

**cognitive**

Relating to conscious intellectual activity such as intellectual capacity, perception, judgment, memory, and reasoning.

behavioral therapy.

Psychotherapy helps children speak, draw, play or write about their trauma. Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) teaches children to manage their fear. In CBT, the child doesn't talk directly about the upsetting event but instead learns skills to deal with difficult feelings. Trauma-focused *cognitive behavioral therapy*

**cognitive behavioral therapy**

A therapeutic approach that teaches individuals how to control their thoughts so they can better manage their unwanted feelings and prevent troublesome behaviors.

(TF-CBT) can teach children to manage their fears by learning skills to deal with difficult feelings and situations. Therapy for PTSD often involves a parent or another person who takes care of the child.

Antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications can help kids with PTSD feel less fear and anxiety. A hypertension medication called Prazosin can also help kids who have a lot of nightmares.

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