

### Engage Your Child (continued)

- ⇒ **Reassure your child.** The event was not their fault, you love them, and it's OK for them to feel upset, angry, or scared.
- ⇒ **Don't pressure your child into talking.** It can be very difficult for some kids to talk about their traumatic experience. A young child may find it easier to draw a picture illustrating their feelings rather than talk about them. You can then talk with your child about what they've drawn.
- ⇒ **Be honest.** While you should tailor the information you share according to your child's age, it's important to be honest. Don't say nothing's wrong if something *is* wrong.
- ⇒ **Do "normal" things with your child,** things that have nothing to do with the traumatic event. Encourage your child to seek out friends and pursue games, sports, and hobbies that they enjoyed before the traumatic event. Go on family outings to the park or beach, enjoy a games night, or watch a funny or uplifting movie together.

### Encourage Physical Activity

Physical activity can burn off adrenaline, release mood-enhancing endorphins, and help your child to sleep better at night.

- ⇒ **Find a sport** that your child enjoys. Activities such as basketball, soccer, running, martial arts, or swimming that require moving both the arms and legs can help rouse your child's nervous system from that "stuck" feeling that often follows a traumatic experience.
- ⇒ **Offer to participate** in sports, games, or physical activities with your child. If they seem resistant to get off the couch, play some of their favorite music and dance together. Once a child gets moving, they'll start to feel more energetic.
- ⇒ **Encourage your child** to go outside to play with friends or a pet and blow off steam.
- ⇒ **Schedule** a family outing to a hiking trail, swimming pool, or park.
- ⇒ **Take younger children** to a playground, activity center, or arrange play dates.

### Feed/Eat Healthy Diet

The food your child eats can have a profound impact on his or her mood and ability to cope with traumatic stress. Processed and convenience food, refined carbohydrates, and sugary drinks and snacks can create mood swings and worsen symptoms of traumatic stress. Conversely, eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and/or high-quality protein, can help your child better cope with the ups and downs that follow a tragic event.

- ⇒ **Focus on overall diet rather than specific foods.** Kids should be eating whole, minimally processed food—food that is as close to its natural form as possible.
- ⇒ **Limit fried food, sweet desserts, sugary snacks and cereals, and refined flour.** These can all exacerbate symptoms of traumatic stress in kids.
- ⇒ **Be a role model.** The childhood impulse to imitate is strong, so don't ask your child to eat vegetables while you gorge on soda and French fries.
- ⇒ **Cook more meals at home.** Restaurant and takeout meals have more added sugar and unhealthy fat so cooking at home can have a huge impact on your kids' health. If you make large batches, cooking just a few times can be enough to feed your family for the whole week.
- ⇒ **Make mealtimes about more than just food.** Gathering the family around a table for a meal is an ideal opportunity to talk and listen to your child without the distraction of TV, phones, or computers.

### When to Seek Treatment

Usually, your child's feelings of anxiety, numbness, confusion, guilt, and despair following a traumatic event will start to fade within a relatively short time. However, if the traumatic stress reaction is so intense and persistent that it's getting in the way of your child's ability to function at school or home, he or she may need help from a mental health professional—preferably a trauma specialist.

### **Traumatic Stress Warning Signs**

- ⇒ It's been three to four weeks, and your child is not feeling any better
- ⇒ Your child is having trouble functioning at school
- ⇒ Your child is experiencing terrifying memories, nightmares, or flashbacks
- ⇒ Your child has physical complaints such as headaches, stomach pains, or sleep disturbances
- ⇒ Your child is having an increasingly difficult time relating to friends and family
- ⇒ Your child or teen is experiencing suicidal thoughts
- ⇒ Your child is avoiding more and more things that remind them of the traumatic event



## Information for Parents

**A volunteer team of public safety and affiliate professionals serving regional fire, EMS, law enforcement, industry, educational, and other organizations involved in any type of critical incident.**

Confidential services provided at no charge:

- Pre-Incident Stress Education
- Individual Peer Support
- Crisis Management Briefing
- Defusing
- Debriefing
- Follow-Up
- Referral

To Request Service/Response:

**1-800-567-4673**

For Information Contact:

allcountycism@gmail.com  
wocism@gmail.com  
www.cism.care



Mental Health &  
Recovery Services  
Board of  
Allen, Auglaize and  
Hardin Counties  
www.wecarepeople.org



More Information at [HelpGuide.Org](http://HelpGuide.Org)

# Information for Parents...

Parents, much like you have to teach your children to ride a bike, or write their name, you will need to teach them how to talk about their feelings and manage their emotions after a tragedy. That is not always comfortable. You will set the tone for how much your child talks to you about a loss or a crisis. If you never bring it up, they may feel it is not okay or “safe” to do so. So it will be important that you *do* talk about it, and “check in” with your child. Phrases like, “I was thinking about \_\_\_\_\_ today, and you must really miss them,” or “I would think going to practice might be hard without your friend,” can help start a conversation and help them to know their feelings are normal. And you will help them know it is okay to be sad. You can cry with your child. You do not have to be “strong for them” all of the time. Crying and sadness are a normal and healthy reaction to a tragedy. But, do not make your child responsible for your feelings. Reassure them that you are sad too, but they don’t need to “fix that.” Phrases like “I’m really sad too, and I’m sad for you, and we can be sad together,” and “No one has to make that go away right away, that will take some time.” Be careful not to put a “quick fix” on their sadness.

Avoid terms like “at least” (i.e. at least they had a good life, at least you have other friends, etc.). Those terms minimize the importance and the magnitude of a loss. Not everything has a silver lining, and we don’t need to search for one to make a tragedy “okay.”

Remember that “special” days may be particularly difficult—birthdays, first days of practice or school, graduations, anniversaries of the loss, and other “milestone” type days that their loved one will not be able to witness.

## **Please note:**

It is never inappropriate to ask someone about whom you are concerned about suicide or self harm (i.e. if they are planning to die by suicide). If the person tells you they are, please wait with them while seeking immediate medical or mental health care for the person.

## **Traumatic Stress and Its Impact on Children**

Being involved in a natural disaster, motor vehicle accident, plane crash, or terrorist attack can be overwhelmingly stressful, especially for children. A traumatic event can undermine their sense of security, leaving them feeling helpless and vulnerable, especially if the event stemmed from an act of violence, such as a mass shooting or terrorist attack. Even kids or teens not directly affected by a disaster can become traumatized when repeatedly exposed to horrific images of the event on the news or social media.

## **Effect of Traumatic Stress on Children and Teens**

### **Children ages 5 and under may:**

- Show signs of fear
- Cling to parents or caregivers
- Cry, scream, or whimper
- Move aimlessly or become immobile
- Return to behaviors common to being younger, such as thumb sucking or bedwetting

### **Children ages 6 to 11 may:**

- Lose interest in friends, family, and fun activities
- Have nightmares or other sleep problems
- Become irritable, disruptive, or angry
- Struggle with school and homework
- Complain of physical problems
- Develop unfounded fears
- Feel depressed, emotionally numb, or guilty over what happened

### **Adolescents ages 12 to 17 may:**

- Have flashbacks to the event, nightmares, or other sleep problems
- Avoid reminders of the event
- Abuse alcohol, drugs, or tobacco
- Be disruptive, disrespectful, or destructive
- Have physical complaints
- Feel isolated, guilty, or depressed
- Loose interest in hobbies and interests
- Have suicidal thoughts

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

## **Traumatic Stress Recovery Tips:**

### **Minimize Media Exposure**

Children who’ve experienced a traumatic event can often find relentless media coverage to be further traumatizing. Excessive exposure to images of a disturbing event—such as repeatedly viewing video clips on social media or news sites—can even create traumatic stress in children or teens who were not directly affected by the event.

- ⇒ **Limit your child’s media exposure to the traumatic event.** Don’t let your child watch the news or check social media just before bed, and make use of parental controls on the TV, computer, and tablet to prevent your child from repeatedly viewing disturbing footage.
- ⇒ **As much as you can, watch news reports of the traumatic event with your child.** You can reassure your child as you’re watching and help place information in context.
- ⇒ **Avoid exposing your child to graphic images and videos.** It’s often less traumatizing for a child or teen to read the newspaper rather than watch television coverage or view video clips of the event.

### **Engage Your Child**

You can’t force your child to recover from traumatic stress, but you can play a major role in the healing process by simply spending time together and talking face to face, free from TV, games, and other distractions. Do your best to create an environment where your kids feel safe to communicate what they’re feeling and to ask questions.

- ⇒ **Provide your child with ongoing opportunities to talk** about what they went through or what they’re seeing in the media. Encourage them to ask questions and express their concerns but don’t force them to talk.
- ⇒ **Acknowledge and validate your child’s concerns.** The traumatic event may bring up unrelated fears and issues in your child. Comfort for your child comes from feeling understood and accepted by you, so acknowledge their fears even if they don’t seem relevant to you.