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When stress has overwhelmed your child, you can support healing. Your relationship with your child can help buffer the impact of trauma or stress.

Trauma occurs when frightening experiences, exposure, or events overwhelm a child's ability to cope. Trauma can occur from one big event, like a storm or a car crash, or ongoing exposure and experiences that are frightening and harmful.



Each child is different, so how they experience a situation is different as well

If your child has experienced a stressful or potentially traumatic event, you may notice a change in their behavior. Your child might not know what caused their fearful or strong reaction. It could be a sound, a smell, a facial expression, or a movement that reminds them of a stressful or traumatic event. Your response during and after a stressful experience can help your child feel physically and emotionally safe. Healing ways to respond include:

Prioritize the relationship with your child. Connect with your child to help them feel safe, secure, and seen.

► Play together

- Engage in activities where you and your child find joy (e.g., playing outside, art, crafts, dancing, reading, storytelling, cooking).

► Find time to check in and connect with your child

- Continue or create opportunities for conversations with your child about their interests, likes, dislikes, feelings, or friends.
 - *What was something surprising that happened today?*
 - *What was a challenge today?*
 - *What made you feel loved today?*
 - *What made you laugh today?*

► Talk about your feelings

- Children watch adults to make sense of the world around them. Seeing you upset or angry can be upsetting and scary for your child. Don't hesitate to explain your feelings to your child (e.g., "I feel sad today because I miss grandma. It's normal and okay to feel sad.").

Be Consistent. Predictability helps support safety by giving your child clear information about what will happen next and what is expected of them. Encourage all caregivers to talk with the child about routines, expectations, and transitions.



► **Consistent routines**

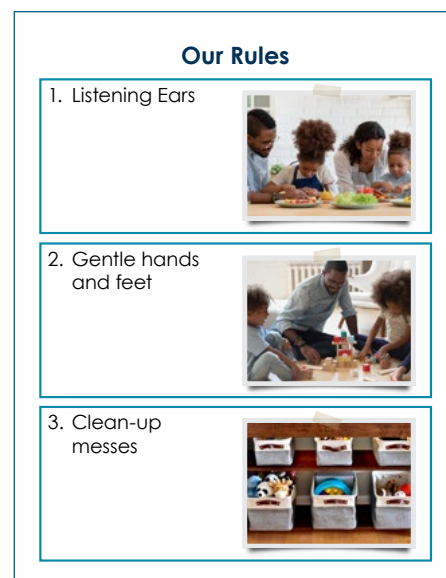
- Review your daily schedule. Let your child know if a change is coming.
- Make the day or activities in the day predictable. Try to have a similar order for activities or routines (e.g., we wash hands, eat dinner, have a bath, read together, and then go to sleep).

► **Clear expectations and rules**

- Provide directions in clear and simple language. Say what you want to see (e.g., “Use walking feet” instead of saying “don’t run”).
- Post visuals of expectations or family rules.
- Review expectations and rules with your family (e.g., “Remember, when we play with our friends, we use kind words and soft touches.”).

► **Prepare for transitions**

- Give a warning (e.g., “Five more minutes, then we go outside to play.”).
- Show a visual of what activity is coming next.
- Use a timer (e.g., “When the timer goes off, it is time to clean up.”).



Show understanding of changes in behavior. A big behavior might happen because of stress from the situation. Show your child you understand.

► **Pay attention to your words and how you say them.**

- In a calm voice, “I notice your fists are balled up. It looks like you are feeling angry.”
- “I feel scared too. We’ve got this. Let’s take deep breaths together.”

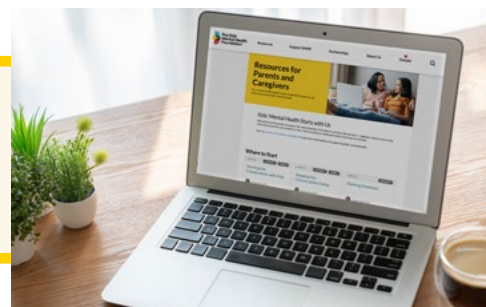
► **Have empathy for your child and their experience in the moment, and for yourself, too.**

- “That felt really hard for both of us.”
- “There’s nothing that will change about how much I love you.”

► **Recognize that your child may use behavior to show you that they feel scared, overwhelmed, or unsafe. Help your child understand their feelings and experiences so they feel safe and begin to heal.**

- “You’ve asked me several times when we are leaving. It can feel confusing when we don’t know when something is happening. Let’s check our schedule together to know when we plan to leave.”
- “You’re covering your ears! Sometimes, loud noises can be scary. Let’s sit together until we both feel safe.”

If you are reading this and think you could use extra support, reach out to a trusted adult, such as your child’s teacher, director, or another family. You can also explore the resources below. It is okay to reach out for help.



Website

Resource Description

[Kids Mental Health Foundation - Resources for Parents and Caregivers](https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-resources/parents) ¹

Free resources to help children manage life’s challenges.

[National Institutes of Health - Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Traumatic Events](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-disasters-and-other-traumatic-events) ²

Resources for helping children cope with disasters and traumatic experiences.

[National Center for Relational Health and Trauma-Informed Care](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/trauma-informed-care/resources-for-families/?srltid=AfmBOorj33RaWdwN4ixX3PtBoHAjIxcCtsB3c8j4wtuA87jvIcFCv34c) ³

Helpful handouts to help children who have experienced trauma and stressful events.

[ChallengingBehavior.org - Family Engagement Resources](https://challengingbehavior.org/implementation/family-engagement/#schedules) ⁴

Free downloadable resources to support routines, schedules, and transitions.

¹ <https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-resources/parents>

² <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-disasters-and-other-traumatic-events>

³ <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/trauma-informed-care/resources-for-families/?srltid=AfmBOorj33RaWdwN4ixX3PtBoHAjIxcCtsB3c8j4wtuA87jvIcFCv34c>

⁴ <https://challengingbehavior.org/implementation/family-engagement/#schedules>