

Understanding Trauma and Its Effects on Children

Trauma is an overwhelming, surprising and unpredictable event or experience, which can occur and interrupt a child's most casual moments.

- Every child copes with trauma differently. How children react to trauma often depends on their age, developmental level, personality and previous experiences.
- Some children have reactions to trauma immediately after an event. Others have reactions weeks or months later.
- Some traumatic events are over quickly, but memories of them can last much longer. Certain sights, sounds and smells might trigger thoughts.
- Some children are traumatized by a single event. Others are traumatized repeatedly.
- Children often think that a traumatic event will happen again; they can find it difficult to believe that it won't be repeated.

Common Reactions

Trauma causes physical and psychological reactions. For instance, children might have:

- Trouble sleeping
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Jumpiness
- Nightmares
- Feelings of detachment
- Flashbacks
- Feelings of insecurity
- Sudden fears
- Increased breathing rate
- Phobias
- Increased blood pressure

Helping Children Cope

Here are some things you can do and some things you shouldn't do.

Do:

- Listen carefully.
- Let them know they're safe.
- Allow them to show all kinds of emotions.
- Answer their questions honestly.
- Spend extra time with them.
- Hug, with permission.
- Support them, even when they're in a bad mood.
- Encourage them to play.
- Maintain a consistent routine.
- Let them have some private time.
- Offer choices, whenever possible.
- Remain calm when around them.
- Expect some regression (going back) in behavior and skills. (For example, they might have toileting accidents.)
- Let them re-tell the traumatic event.
- Give them time to heal their physical and emotional wounds.
- Remember "firsts" and anniversaries (for example, the first holiday after a trauma).
- Take care of yourself.

Don't:

- Force children to talk.
- Minimize or make light of their feelings.
- Make big changes while they're adjusting.
- Lie to them.
- Expose children to violent images or movies, or reminders of trauma.
- Let children hurt themselves or others.
- Blame children for causing a traumatic event.
- Ignore their concerns or feelings.

Questions?

To learn more about treatment options at Gillette for patients who have experienced trauma, contact Child and Family Services at 651-229-3855.

Understanding Trauma and Its Effects on Children - Somali

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Make An Appointment

[651-290-8707](#)

Refer a Patient

[651-325-2200](#)

This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at [651-229-3890](#).