



Helping Your Child After Something Difficult or Scary Has Happened

Children, even young children and babies, know when bad or scary things happen. Ignoring it or telling them it did not happen is more unsettling to them and can make them anxious. You may see changes in their behavior such as they become clingy and do not want to be away from a parent, feel angry, have problems sleeping, worry about things that did not bother them before, etc.

A parent or caregiver can help them after something difficult or scary has happened.

1. Focus on making them feel safe

- Hold them, let them be close
- Tell them you will care for them when things are scary or difficult. Say, “I am here.”
- Keep them away from frightening images on the news or scary conversations
- Keep to their normal routine as much as possible
- Tell them where you are going if you must leave and when you will return

2. Allow them to express feelings

- Children may “behave badly” when they are worried or scared and do not have the words to tell you. Remember! Difficult feelings = Difficult behavior
- Help your child name their feelings: Scared, happy, angry, sad
- Tell them it is ok to feel that way, but it is not ok to have bad behavior “You can feel angry, but you cannot hit.”
- Give them a way to express their feelings, play outside, use words, draw pictures

3. Let them tell you in their words what happened, if they wish.

- Telling the story lets your child make sense of what happened.

The best tool to help your child feel better is You! Just being with them, even if the situation can’t change, will help your child.

Adapted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network NCTSN.org