

Trauma in Kids & Teens

victim
assistance
program™

Ages 1 to 5

Children at this age can not yet understand a crisis and lack the coping skills to deal with it effectively. They will look to adults for support and comfort. They typically do not have the ability to talk about their feelings but will express them through their behaviors.

Symptoms

- Thumb sucking
- Bed-wetting
- Loss of bladder control
- Speech difficulty
- Separation difficulties
- Decrease in appetite
- Fear of the dark

Interventions

- Make the child feel safe and secure.
- Play activities to give them the opportunity to express feelings and thoughts.
- Use clay, paint, crayons, building blocks, puppet, etc. to have the child tell you the story.

Ages 5 to 11

Children at this age are more verbal but more concrete in their thinking and processing. They will often lead you by their questions. Most children do not understand death and may develop genuine fears and separation anxiety.

Symptoms

- Sadness and crying
- Poor concentration
- Irritability and confusion
- School avoidance
- Anxiety and fear
- Regressive or aggressive behaviors
- Eating difficulties
- Attention speaking behavior

Interventions

- Encourage the child to draw, paint, write in a journal or tell a story and then ask them to describe it for you.
- Reflect and normalize the child's feelings and emotions.
- Restore their sense of control by helping them make small decisions.

Ages 11 to 14

Children at this age have a greater sensitivity and understanding about tragic events but often a limited way of responding. They may display bravado, cynicism, or defensiveness but may also display concern for others who were hurt in the incident.

Symptoms

- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in appetite
- Loss of interest
- Withdrawal from peers
- Rebelliousness
- School difficulties
- Depression or anxiety
- Physical ailments

Interventions

- Encourage participation in group discussions.
- Address issues about personal and family safety
- Encourage them to write a letter or practice journaling.
- Reflect and normalize their feelings and emotions.

Ages 14 to 18

Adolescents can usually engage in more abstract and hypothetical thinking. There is also a better sense of death. However, many teenagers maintain distorted thoughts, such as “This won’t happen to me. Bad things only happen to bad people.”

Symptoms

- Intrusive memories
- Anxiety and depression
- Changes in appetite
- School difficulties
- Substance use
- Sleep disturbances
- Anger and irritability
- Withdrawal from peers

Interventions

- Address faulty thoughts regarding the traumatic event.
- Reflect and normalize their feelings and emotions.
- Remain empathic and patient.
- Suggest coping strategies.
- Be aware of their level of understanding.

Source: *Florida Crisis Consortium, Florida Department of Health*

Contact Us

24-hour Hotline | 330.376.0040
24-hour Chat | victimassistanceprogram.org

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