

Supporting a Child Who Has Been Through a Trauma

Long term effects of trauma can be prevented. If we can support the natural resolution to the immediate impacts of an experience, children can rebound and innately heal.

- Go slow and focus on attuning to the child – while keeping yourself grounded.
- Bring the child’s attention to their immediate environment – help them notice what they are experiencing through their physical senses and internal sensations. The point of this is to allow it to shift and settle. Go slowly and follow their pace.
- Provide guidance for ensuring physical safety, and facilitate rest – even if they say they are fine. Keep the environment quiet and peaceful.
- After there has been some settling – perhaps at a later time – ask some questions; give the child an opportunity to express their emotions and how they are making sense of what happened.

Longer Term Support for Working It Through

Providing a relaxed and flexible environment with clear and predictable guidelines and boundaries is key to allow a child or teen to be open to themselves and to you.

1. Don’t be afraid to talk about the traumatic event, yet allow the child room to guide the pacing of this – they will bring it up when they feel safe enough to do so.
2. Be a real person – talk honestly with them, giving age-appropriate information, and be genuinely curious about their lives.
3. Provide a consistent, predictable pattern for the day or session.
4. Be nurturing and comforting with clear healthy boundaries. Recognize that the child or teen may have differing tolerance levels for closeness and respect this.
5. Discuss your expectations for behaviour and your style of discipline with the child. Model saying “No” with appropriate rationale and maintaining connection.
6. Watch closely for signs of *re-enactment* (in play, drawings etc.), *avoidance* (daydreaming, withdrawing) and *physiological hyper-activity* (anxiety, sleep problems, impulsive behaviours).
7. Protect the child – cut short or stop activities that are upsetting or re-traumatizing.
8. Give the child “choices” and some sense of control (be realistic and age-appropriate).
9. Ask for help if you have questions and need more support.

For additional ideas on treating traumatized children see the Resources page at the back of the manual.
