Supporting Children Who Have Faced Trauma

Infants and Toddlers (0–2 Years Old)

Infants and toddlers cannot understand that something traumatic has happened, but they know when their caregiver is upset. They may start to show the same emotions as their caregivers or they may act differently, like crying for no reason, withdrawing from people, or not playing with their toys.

Behaviors
- Crying more than usual
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping more than usual

What Caregiver Can Do
- Reassure as needed and be patient
- Keep routines in care normal and consistent
- Hold and rock more, be affectionate

Children (3–5 Years Old)

At this age children can recognize that something traumatic has happened. They may have trouble adjusting to change and loss. They may depend on the adults around them to help them feel better.

Behaviors
- More clingingness
- Changes in eating or bowel movements

What Caregiver Can Do
- Keep a positive attitude
**Supporting Children**

- **Keep Routines Normal** and continue favorite rituals or activities.
- Always **reassure children** that you will do whatever you can to keep them safe.
- Maintain a “**peaceful**” atmosphere.
- **Talk about the event** when children bring it up: do not try to change the subject. Correct any “false” ideas young children may have about what happened.
- Make sure children are eating **regular, healthy meals**.
- **Answer any questions** children have. Be honest without giving a lot of details.
- **Limit exposure to the media** and adult conversations about the disaster.

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**TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS**

**Behaviors**

- Loss of appetite
- Cries or screams a lot
- Clinginess
- May regress to acting younger, for example, wanting a bottle or using “baby talk”
- Being more aggressive, hitting or pushing

**What Caregiver Can Do**

- Continue to hug and give affection
- Pay attention to how they play
- Play with them

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**Help children feel in control** by allowing them to have choices, such as choosing an activity. Choices give them a voice and allow them to be responsible for their actions or decisions.

**Teach children ways to calm themselves** like dancing to music, breathing deeply, or doing art activities.

**Give opportunities for emotional expression** through activities like playing with playdough, drawing, building, or dramatic play.