

# TRAUMA & POST TRAUMATIC STRESS

## Fact Sheet

### What is trauma?

A trauma is a bad experience that was frightening or shocking. You might have gotten hurt or were afraid you were about to get hurt. Or it could be an experience that happened to someone else you care about in which that person got hurt or you were afraid that person would get hurt.

Traumas can include: Physical or sexual abuse, assault or sexual assault, seeing violence at home or in the community, disasters like a fire or an explosion, serious accidents, violent crime, the sudden or violent death of someone you know or care about, or any other experience that caused you to be very scared.

You might not know this, but more than half of kids will have some kind of trauma. This means that other kids you know have gone through a trauma. You are not alone.

### What are some common reactions to trauma?

Common reactions can include difficulty sleeping, depression, worry, and physical symptoms such as aches, pains, or dizziness.

One specific reaction is called Posttraumatic Stress (PTS). PTS is caused by trauma reminders.

### Trauma reminders are:

1. Memories of what happened.
2. Anything that makes you think about the trauma: hearing someone talk about it; a sound or smell; the person or place involved with the trauma, someone who is like the person who did the trauma; TV, songs or movies that mention a similar trauma; or anything else that reminds you of what happened.

### What is Posttraumatic Stress (PTS)?

#### PTS can be feelings:

- Being scared, confused, sad, ashamed or angry
- Sleep problems or nightmares
- Concentration problems, being jumpy, nervous, on edge
- Not wanting to be around reminders of the trauma or to be away from close family

#### PTS can be thoughts:

- Memories of the trauma coming in your mind all the time
- Blaming yourself for what happened
- Thinking you are a bad person because of what happened
- Not trusting people
- Worry that it will happen again

## **Is PTS normal?**

Yes! It is normal to have difficult reactions following a trauma. You might have really strong reactions or milder reactions. Everyone is different. There is no right or wrong way to respond to a trauma.

## **When is PTS a problem?**

PTS is usually worst right after the trauma and then gets better after a while. After a few weeks or months, most of the time, PTS is not a big problem. When PTS does not get better over time or if it gets worse, it is can be called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Counseling can help you overcome PTSD.

## **What helps with PTS?**

It helps to know that reactions are normal and usually will get better after a while. The chances are very good that you will get better. Sometimes you can do this on your own or with help from your family; sometimes a counselor can help, too.

## **Tips to help with the reactions:**

- Remind yourself that the trauma is over and you are not in danger now
- Tell yourself you did the best you could in the situation
- Learn about your trauma reminders so you can be ready to handle them
- Practice stopping and calming down when you have reactions
- Try not to avoid reminders or situations as long as they are safe
- Let your family know what they can do to help you feel safe and be safe

If you are still in a situation that is scary or possibly dangerous, make a safety plan for what to do in case of trouble. Get a family member or trusted adult to help with the plan. If you don't know someone, ask a teacher at your school to help you find someone who can help.

## **What is counseling for PTS?**

Counseling is talking to a professional who is an expert in helping in kids like you learn to manage the reactions to the trauma. The counselor works with you (and maybe your family - whatever family you are living with) to teach you ways to handle reactions. The counselor helps you become an expert in your trauma reactions and how to handle them in a helpful way.

## **How long does counseling last?**

How long it lasts depends on how you are doing. It can be a few sessions or it can be a few months. What is most important is that the counselor has special training to help kids who have been through trauma. Check your counselor out! You can ask how long you will need to go to them for help.

## **Long term effects of trauma.**

No one forgets that they went through a trauma. It will always be a bad experience and you might never forget about it. You might have some permanent changes because you went through a trauma. But not all of the changes are bad. Sometimes you learn how much you can handle and that you are a stronger person because of it. Maybe you will be more prepared than other kids for handling situations that could be dangerous or scary. You may be able to help other kids if they go through a trauma. Try to think about what you have learned and how you are better prepared to handle bad experiences.

## **What else do I need to know?**

Ask for help if you are having a hard time with your trauma reactions, there is always someone who can help. You have a really good chance of getting over the trauma, especially if you can get the support and help you need. A lot of kids experience trauma and most recover fully with the right help and some time.