

# Adolescents And Trauma



A traumatic event occurs when a person's safety is threatened and becomes at risk alongside others. Unfortunately, for over half of the children in the United States - it is a common experience for them to go through a traumatic event.

Trauma for anyone, but especially for adolescents, can significantly impact their life. It can lead to problems with health, school, and behavior. It is also a major risk factor for most substance use and behavioral health disorders.

Therefore, it is imperative for adults to recognize a child's response to trauma, and learn how to help them cope with these experiences.

- A child may have physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes in response to traumatic events.
- Trauma can lead to increased problems with education, mental, and physical health for a child.
- With support from caregivers and access to treatment, children can recover from traumatic events.

## Types Of Childhood Traumatic Events

- Military family-related stressors
- Sudden and violent loss of a loved one
- Neglect of basic needs
- Witnessing or experiencing domestic violence
- Psychological, physical or sexual abuse
- Commercial sexual exploitation
- Community and school-based violence
- Refugee or war experiences
- Natural disasters or terrorism
- Serious accidents or life-threatening illnesses

## An Adolescent's Response To Traumatic Events

	Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
All Ages	Stomach pain and headaches.	Vivid nightmares and problems with concentration.	Intense thoughts of wanting revenge and feeling guilty.	Loss of interest in fun activities. Disruptive and disrespectful behaviors.
Younger Children	Losing weight and eating poorly.	Adding elements of the trauma into their imaginary play.	Increased fearfulness, irritability, and anxiety. Clings to caregivers often.	Crying and screaming a lot. Return to bedwetting and thumb sucking.
Older Children	Misuse of alcohol and other drugs. Engaging in self-harm.	Development of eating disorders. Frequent mood swings.	Increased levels of anger and resentment. Feeling alone and depressed.	Engaging in risky sexual behaviors and withdrawal from others.



**CONNECTICUT Clearinghouse**  
a program of the Connecticut Center  
for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

800.232.4424 (phone)  
[www.ctclearinghouse.org](http://www.ctclearinghouse.org)

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

**Connecticut Resources**

**2-1-1 of Connecticut**

[www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org) or call 2-1-1

**Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Health**

[www.empsct.org](http://www.empsct.org)

**Connecticut Network of Care for Behavioral Health**

[www.networkofcare.org](http://www.networkofcare.org)

**National Resources**

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**The National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

**How Trauma Can Impact An Adolescent Life?**

A child who has suffered from trauma-related stress may begin to struggle with their education; they may develop learning problems, their grades may decrease, and they are at a higher risk of expulsion from school.

They may begin to struggle with their health as well; they are more likely to develop long-term health problems such as heart disease or diabetes.

They are also more likely to need to use mental and physical health services.

**Recovering From Traumatic Events**

When a traumatized child has access to a good support system, health services and effective treatments, there is hope and recovery is possible.

It is imperative for caregivers and other family members to help the child cope in the aftermath of the traumatic event, and to ensure the child knows they are safe.

Children have more success in their recovery when caring and trusted adults are involved in the process.

**What Can Adults Do To Help Traumatized Children?**

<b>Look After Them</b>	Make sure that they are in a safe environment and their basic needs are being met. Reiterate to them that they are safe now. Provide them needed structure through establishing routines such as eating dinner on a schedule and establishing bedtimes.
<b>Pay Attention</b>	Be observant of their behavior. Watch for any sudden behavior changes such as acting emotionally numb, being easily spooked, or acting very depressed. If behavior does not begin to subside after a few weeks, consider asking a professional for help.
<b>Ask For Help</b>	Reach out to their primary healthcare provider, and/or a school counselor for a referral for a trained mental health practitioner. Having access to professionals and services for trauma related treatment is imperative to help a child cope and recover from a traumatic event.
<b>Be Patient</b>	Everyone’s path of recovery looks different; some may be longer than others. Allow them to express their emotions about the traumatic event, and do not shy away from discussing what has happened if they bring it up. Do not force them to “toughen up” or act brave.
<b>Talk To Them</b>	Assure them that what happened was not their fault, and they should not feel guilty. Many children often blame themselves for what happened, even when the event was completely out of their control. Do not push them to talk about the traumatic event before they are ready to do so.

**Where To Find Help In Connecticut**

For information regarding children coping with traumatic events, and how to help them with this issue, please call 2-1-1 or visit [www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org).



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Mental Health & Addiction Services