

Young People and Trauma

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

Young people exposed to trauma such as violence, death, accidents, or disasters are likely to show signs of stress. Young people are likely to exhibit some of the following symptoms. If symptoms do not decrease in severity after a few weeks you are encouraged to seek professional assistance.

Common Reaction of Young Children and Pre-adolescents

- Nightmares and night terror
- Nervous behavior
- Worry over safety of loved ones
- Confusion
- Irritability
- Physical complaints
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Poor concentration
- Suppression of emotion
- Attention to adult reactions
- Repetitious play
- Difficulty separating from parents
- Fears about safety
- Question how this could be done
- Magical ideas related to event
- Exaggerated startle response
- Re-enactment of events in play
- Bedwetting or thumb-sucking
- Excessive fear of the dark
- Fear of being alone
- Outbursts and tantrums



- Statements about or acts of self harm
- Ongoing wish to join the dead person
- Withdrawal from friends
- Sharp drop in school performance
 - Refusal to attend school or major events
 - Dramatic change in eating and/or sleeping
- Violent or threatening behavior

Parents and Caregivers Can Help

- Provide assurance that he/she is protected
- Hold, hug and touch your child often
- Give honest information at their level
- Be tolerant of symptoms of stress reactions
- Spend extra time, especially at bed time
- Attend to concerns expressed in art or play
- Help identify, label and express feelings
- Acknowledge normal feelings and reaction
- Watch for and correct his/her self blame
- Be available and encourage questions
- Protect from exposure to unwanted details
- Develop and/or review safety plans

Warning Signs: When to seek Professional Help

- Any substance use or abuse
- Extended periods of depression
- Ongoing loss of interest in daily activities
- Acting much younger for extended periods
- Excessive imitating of the dead person

Information Provided by:
New York State
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2001

(continued)

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For additional information, please contact:

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| ▶ Connecticut Helps, Office of Family Support | (860) 418-6262 |
| ▶ United Way Infoline | 2-1-1 |
| ▶ Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services | (800) 446-7348 |
| ▶ Connecticut Department of Children and Families | (860) 550-6484 |
| ▶ Connecticut Clearinghouse | (800) 232-4424 |

