

From the Tutor: 6 Things Parents Can Do to Help a Child Through Trauma

As a private tutor I am often a part of the path to recovery for a traumatized kid. In this article I offer advice to parents on what to expect and how to respond.

Sickness, accident, or family upheaval can all disrupt life so much that the regular classroom is an impossible situation for a child. That's where I come in. I have two goals: Get/keep the student up to speed academically, and move him or her back to readiness for the classroom. It can be a scary and confusing time, not just for the child, but also for parents who want to help but don't know how to cope with new behaviors.

Here are things to remember:

1. Some children need to talk; others won't talk. In either case your child needs to know that YOU are willing to listen. And I do mean LISTEN, not share, not advise, not guide – listen. Just keep on telling your child you are there and want to HEAR. Tell them every day for as long as it 'takes'
2. Clinginess and fear of separation are nearly universal in traumatized children. In teens and tweens these might look like anger. Regardless of age this behavior will pass on its own, so you as the parent should just give all the 'hugs' and reassurance it takes in the moment and wait it out.
3. Rules and routine are comforting for children. Now is NOT the time to drop discipline. The cocoon of daily routine can make 'crazy' times seem more normal. On the other hand, in a life that can feel OUT of control giving the child choices of things like what to wear, what to make for dinner and the like can help restore confidence, confidence that will be needed in their return to school and regular activities.
4. Bedtime and nighttime can be the worst times. Sleeping patterns are disrupted for troubled children just as they are for adults who are under stress. On the other hand, children need to sleep those eight hours at night for health and for comfort. For a short time after a traumatic 'event' it might help to change sleeping times or even to allow children to sleep closer to you, but, if the child is to get back to 'normal', it is important that regular bedtime and sleeping routines be reestablished as quickly as possible.
5. Go out of your way to help your child stay in touch with friends. Other than family, friends are a child's whole world. They need to feel that even with their current 'trouble' their world is right there waiting for them to rejoin it. Invite friends to visit, and, if possible, attend church, school, or community events with



your child and one or more of their friends. Allow your child to accept invitations to visit friends or attend parties. Any way you can, help them revive interactions with their peers, and with both old and new friends.

6. As the day for the return to school approaches, be supportive. Talk about it with your child. Go together to make brief visits to the school and classroom. Both of you talk with teacher[s] to find out about what is being studied and about current projects and assignments so that you child can be right up to date the day they return.

Only time can make the effects of a trauma fade, but what you as the parent do NOW can make ALL the difference. Love them, believe in them and TELL THEM so!

Jo Karabasz

