

How to support your teen after trauma (ages 13 – 18 years)



What you may notice

- Strong feelings like sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt and shame
- May overreact to small things
- May keep thinking about the trauma over and over and talk about it often
- Sleep problems like not being able to sleep well, waking up often or not being able to fall asleep
- May withdraw from family and friends
- May want to spend more time alone
- May be very protective of family and friends
- New problems with milestones already met – they may act younger like give up responsibilities or start to rebel all of a sudden
- May not want to or be able to do as many things on their own
- Only focus on themselves and care only about what is important in that moment or in the near future
- Loss of interest in school, friends, hobbies or life in general
- May be cynical (or negative) and may not trust others

Ways you can support your teen

- Express your love and support by spending time with them
- Schedule family activities more often than normal
- Work with your teen to make changes in their responsibilities as they recover. Be flexible. Avoid being strict about sticking to the way things were before the trauma
- Keep giving love and support, even when it feels hard
- Allow for time with friends and other teens their age
- Gently assure them they are having a “normal” reaction to a scary experience and it is okay to feel this way
- If your teen says they want to hurt themselves or others, seek professional help immediately
- Encourage your teen to talk to a trusted adult about their experience
- Encourage your teen to talk through feelings, fears and concerns. Wait to give your feedback until asked

Call your child’s doctor if you believe your child needs help right away. If your child is still upset or worried after a few weeks, talk with your child’s doctor or school counselor.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child’s doctor or a member of your child’s healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.