

TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUTH WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

1. BE A GOOD LISTENER

Listen to what youth say. Be attentive and allow them to express their thoughts, concerns, and ask questions. Respond with honest and age-appropriate language.



2. VALIDATE EMOTIONS

Youth may feel a variety of different emotions after experiencing a traumatic event such as anger, sadness, fear, and more. Validate these emotions- let children know that what they are feeling is normal.



3. MAINTAIN ROUTINES

Regular routines can bring stability and feelings of normalcy for children. Setting routines can include: Having meals together, setting bedtimes, engaging in regular activities and more.



4. LIMIT MEDIA EXPOSURE

Limit exposure to media/news that are about traumatic events. This is especially important for younger children, as witnessing traumatic events can heighten fear and anxiety.



5. CO-REGULATE

Model calm behaviour to children. This can include practicing breathing exercises together or offering a quiet space.



6. SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

If trauma reactions persist or worsen, reach out to a trauma-informed counsellor or mental health professional who can provide specialized supports for youth.



CAREGIVER TIPS IN RESPONDING TO YOUTH WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

Regulate your reactions- It is normal to become frustrated or upset as a caregiver. However, showing intense reactions such as anger can be frightening for children. Understanding your own emotions is a key step in supporting youth.

Allow children and youth to open up about their feelings and experiences at their own pace- Some youth will want to talk about their trauma right away while others will not. Pressuring a child to talk before they feel ready can be frightening or triggering.

Work to build trust- Some youth who have experienced trauma have been hurt by an adult they trusted and may struggle to trust others. Establish a safe and supportive environment.

There is no set timeline for recovering from trauma- Every child is different and will have their own pace. Some children may recover quickly, while for others, reactions to trauma can persist for years. Additionally, people, places, events and feelings can all remind youth of a traumatic event.

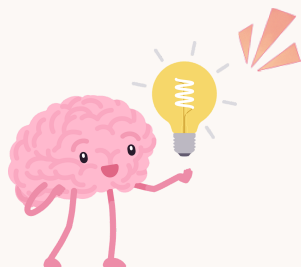


Having at least one trusted adult who shows patience and support is an important step in the healing process for youth



Windsor Essex
Child/Youth
Advocacy Centre

Understanding Trauma in Youth



What is Trauma?

 Trauma is a child's response to an overwhelming or frightening event that feels unsafe or beyond their ability to cope.

Trauma Can Be...

- A singular, recent event
- An event that happened in the past
- An ongoing or repeated series of events or circumstances

Common types of Trauma

- Neglect
- Sexual assault
- Physical or emotional abuse
- Being a victim of crime
- Bullying
- Unstable housing
- Witnessing violence
- Separation from caregivers
- Medical trauma

What is the Impact of Trauma on Youth?

- Long term physical or mental health issues
- Reduced sense of safety and security
- Changes in brain development
- Drop in academic performance

What are the responses youth may have to trauma?

- Responses that youth may have to trauma can be emotional, physical or behavioural.



Windsor Essex Child/Youth Advocacy Centre
St. Clair College- Centre for Applied Health Sciences
(519) 995-3970
www.wecyac.ca



AGE RELATED TRAUMA REACTIONS IN YOUTH

Reactions youth may have can depend on the developmental stage and age a child is at. Down below are common trauma reactions across youth of different age groups.

YOUNG/PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

- May regress to earlier behaviours such as bed-wetting, thumb sucking, and baby talk
- Become more clingy
- May reenact traumatic events through play
- Throw tantrums

SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

- Have problem concentrating in school
- Feel shame related to the traumatic event
- Feel guilt or shame over a traumatic event
- Have sleep disturbances such as nightmares or trouble sleeping

ADOLESCENTS

- Engage in more risky behaviours such as drug and alcohol use
- May have fantasies of getting revenge
- Feel self-conscious about their emotions/reactions related to a traumatic event
- Feel guilt or shame about the traumatic event



Windsor Essex Child/Youth Advocacy Centre
St. Clair College-Centre for Applied Health Sciences
(519) 995-3970
www.wecyac.ca

Recognizing Trauma Responses in Youth



Every individual will have different reactions and responses to trauma. Down below are just some common trauma responses in youth caregivers should be aware of.

Emotional Signs

- Fear
- Shame
- Anger
- Sadness
- Emotional numbness
- Guilt
- Difficulty trusting adults

Physical Signs

- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Digestion issues

Behavioural Signs

- Aggression
- Tantrums
- Having nightmares or trouble sleeping
- Regression in young children (bed wetting, thumb sucking)
- Risk-taking (alcohol use, drug use)
- Clinginess
- Avoiding certain people or places
- Withdrawing from loved ones

Things to keep in mind:

01

Not all children will experience traumatic stress after a traumatic event. Additionally, two children can experience the same event differently. Responses to trauma can depend on a variety of factors, such as age, support systems, and more.

02

Behaviours are a way of communicating and coping with trauma. Next time a child shows challenging behaviours try to reframe from “what’s wrong with this child” to “what happened to this child?”



CAREGIVERS WELLNESS



Supporting children can feel emotionally and mentally heavy. Prioritizing your own wellbeing is just as important as supporting youth.

Caregivers should be aware of:

- **Compassion fatigue**- stress or emotional strain that often arises due to exposure to other peoples trauma
- **Burnout**- physical or mental exhaustion often caused by work or stressful experiences
- **Secondary trauma**- psychological impact from hearing about, witnessing trauma.

Signs of Burnout

- Feeling exhausted more than usual
- No energy
- Feeling overwhelmed about hearing about other peoples experiences
- Frequent headaches or body aches
- Feeling hopeless



Why is this important to address?

Burnout or long-term stress can cause a strain on your mental and physical wellbeing.

Caregivers who feel regulated are better able to effectively help children regulate.



Windsor Essex
Child/Youth
Advocacy Centre

Self-Care Tips

Self-care is about taking proactive steps to engage in things that improve our physical and mental health.

Eat Healthy



Eating healthy can boost our mood and reenergize our body.

Journal



Journaling can be a helpful outlet in reflecting on experiences and engaging in self-reflection about emotions.

Reach out for Support

Family, friends, peer support groups, or mental health professionals can all be strong support systems.

Exercise

Regular moderate exercise (at least 2.5 hours a week) such as walking and other physical activities boosts moods and improves health.

Make Time for Hobbies

Scheduling time to engage in hobbies and other activities we love can reduce stress and bring joy.



Prioritize Sleep

Set strict bedtimes and aim for at least 7–9 hours of sleep. Getting sleep is important to regain energy and prevent burnout.

