

This handout was prepared to help you better understand Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in children with and without disabilities

What Is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a group of symptoms and reactions that may follow a traumatic experience (like being in a car accident or watching the World Trade Centers fall)

Like soldiers who have experienced the horrors of war, children exposed to violence can feel emotional and physical “aftershocks” for months or even years to come.

What Happens?

In remembering a terrible event, children may relive it again and again in their minds, sometimes making it harder for them to get through their normal daily activities. Children can show signs of emotional as well as physical distress (“clinginess”, stomach aches, sleep problems, etc.) and their own behavior may become more aggressive, violent, and even self-destructive.

What Can I do to Help a Child who has PTSD?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that you:

- Encourage the child to discuss what happened.
- Allow them to express what they feel, whether it’s being afraid, nervous and/or angry.
- Talk about it, again and again, as many times as necessary, giving them good attention and room to express how they feel.
- In the weeks and months after the violent or traumatic episode, do everything you can to make sure that the child feels safe, and try to bring a sense of normalcy back to their life by returning to their regular daily routine.
- If your child has been exposed to or has witnessed a violent occurrence, they may need a great deal of support and, sometimes, professional counseling is needed in order to handle these new feelings.

Where Can I get More Information?

For more information on PTSD, here are some useful links from reputable organizations

<http://www.ems-c.org/downloads/pdf/ptstress.pdf> is a two page handout on PTSD from the United State’s Emergency Medical Services for Children. A very well done document. Lots of good resources and advice.

http://www.ncptsd.org/facts/disasters/fs_children_disaster.html is a fact sheet written by a pediatric psychologist about how children respond to trauma. It’s from National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/ptsd70.htm> is a fact sheet about PTSD in children from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1999)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/ptsdmenu.cfm> offers information about PTSD for all ages and includes recommendations about caring for children with PTSD. From the United States’ National Institute of Mental Health

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