

Traumatic Stress & Young Children

Below are signs and symptoms related to emotions and behaviors children **may** experience after experiencing a traumatic event(s). Be mindful that children, just as adults, are all not alike, just because they are children. Each child comes with their own individual personalities. Rather it be one child or many children in a family unit, each child is **different and unique**.

- ➔ **Sleep problems:** Difficulty falling or staying asleep. Nightmares, difficulty waking up in the morning. Following a crisis, children may start sleeping with the parent or parents to feel more safe and secure.
- ➔ **Eating problems:** Loss of appetite or increased eating as a source of comfort and security.
- ➔ **Sadness or depression:** Not wanting to engage in previously enjoyed activities or not wanting to be with friends or adults.
- ➔ **Anxiety, worries, or fears:** Concerns that the scary, dangerous, or frightening event will happen again, causing a high level of watchfulness and suspicion. Also, unrelated fears may emerge (becoming more afraid of the dark, develop separation anxiety, becoming very fearful when not in the presence of their parent(s) or caregiver. May show more anxiety around being separated from parent(s) or caregivers.
- ➔ **Difficulty concentrating:** Decreased ability to maintain attention or focus or increased difficulty in learning or applying their learning.
- ➔ **Non-specific complaints:** Of discomfort or pain (such as stomachaches or headaches) complaints of being more tired than usual or other physical symptoms, especially among children with adjustment difficulties and children who have difficulty expressing their emotional concerns.
- ➔ **Regression:** Clinginess and whininess with adults or engagement in (bed wetting, disobeying rules) children have already mastered.
- ➔ **Intrusive and unwanted memories, dreams, and feelings:** Feeling the event may occur again and the child's loss of awareness (dissociation) of where they are. Play activities may include themes associated with the event. Some play may involve reenactment of the traumatic.
- ➔ **Avoidance of memories, thoughts, feelings** and external reminders (people, place, conversations, activities, situations) associated with the event.
- ➔ **Negative** thoughts and feelings (anger, guilt, shame) related to the event.