

Helping children after a traumatic event

Traumatic events involve situations that are either life-threatening or have the potential for serious injury, such as physical or sexual assault, natural disaster, war, or a serious accident. Around two thirds of children will experience at least one of these types of events by the time they turn 16.

After a traumatic event, many children experience strong feelings of fear, sadness, guilt, or anger. They might find it hard to cope and it might take a while to come to terms with what has happened. These reactions will usually become less intense after a few weeks. The support of family and friends is particularly important during this time.

Children's reactions to trauma can often be misunderstood as 'naughty' behaviour. Becoming angry and blaming the child for this behaviour could make things worse. Instead, try these approaches.

- **Reassure** the child that he or she is safe and cared for.
- **When they're ready, listen to and talk with the child about the trauma.** Like adults, children can become frightened about things they don't fully understand.
- **Give the child special attention**, especially at bedtime.
- **Encourage expression of emotions** – they are part of the healing process.
- **Enjoy activities together as a family.**
- **Keep family roles clear.** Don't expect children to take on too much responsibility, but don't become too overprotective either. Try to understand if they can't do what is usually expected of them, like going to school, but talk about how they will get back to their normal routine as soon as possible.

For more information

Download a copy of *Helping my Children after Trauma – A Guide for Parents* from www.phoenixaustralia.org.