

Counseling Partners of Los Angeles

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HELPING KIDS COPE WITH Trauma

COUNSELINGPARTNERSOFLA.ORG

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Counseling Partners of Los Angeles

CPLA's Mission

The mission of Counseling Partners of Los Angeles is to support at-risk and under-served students living in Los Angeles by providing a low-cost, school-based program that delivers essential counseling and support services students need in order to grow toward their full potential emotionally, intellectually, morally and socially.

Interested in counseling for your child?

CPLA's counseling services are **FREE** to all students attending one of our partner schools!

Reach out to the school principal or your child's teacher or request a CPLA referral form from the school.

Follow CPLA on Instagram for more helpful information

@counseling_partners_of_la





What is Trauma?

Trauma is a person's emotional response to a distressing or negative event. No one is immune to trauma, including children. Traumatic events are different from ordinary hardships in that they tend to be unpredictable, sudden, and life-threatening. Trauma's effects are determined by whether they erode a child's sense of safety in the world or foster the sense that a disaster can happen at any time.

Types of Trauma

- **Acute Trauma** - distress caused by a one-time traumatic event that is of short duration (i.e., car crash, sexual assault, death of a loved one)
- **Chronic Trauma** - distress caused by repeated traumatic events over a period of time (i.e. prolonged abuse, consistent bullying, neglect)
- **Complex Trauma** - distress caused by experiencing trauma from which there is no ability to escape and creates a feeling of being trapped
- **Vicarious Trauma** - distress caused by exposure to other people's trauma
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences** - distressing experiences that occur in childhood that the child is not developmentally ready to cope with

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/trauma>

What makes an event traumatic for a child?

Factors that go into making an event traumatic

- **Age** - Younger children are more vulnerable to trauma.
- **Frequency** - Experiencing the same trauma or multiple different traumas repeatedly will have a more lasting effect than a single event
- **Relationship** - Kids who have strong relationships with caregivers are more likely to rebound after trauma
- **Coping Skills** - Self-esteem, physical health, and intelligence act as buffers against trauma
- **Perception** - How much danger the child perceives they are in or how much fear they are experiencing affects how impactful a trauma may be
- **Sensitivity** - Children vary in sensitivity levels - a child who is more sensitive is more likely to be deeply impacted by trauma

"It's not the nature of the event itself that makes something traumatic. It's how the child subjectively experiences the event." - Steven J. Berkowitz, MD

<https://childmind.org/article/makes-event-traumatic-child/>

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/child-trauma.pdf>



Symptoms of trauma in children by age

"PARENTING A TRAUMATIZED CHILD MAY REQUIRE A SHIFT FROM SEEING A 'BAD KID' TO SEEING A KID WHO HAS HAD BAD THINGS HAPPEN" - CHILDREN'S BUREAU

1. Young Children (Ages 0-5)

- a. Fussiness, easily startled, increased frequency of tantrums, clinginess, abnormal activity levels (either lower or higher activity than peers), repeating the trauma in play, delay in reaching developmental milestones

2. School-Age Children (Ages 6-12)

- a. Attention difficulties, becoming withdrawn or quiet, increased sadness, frequent discussion of scary ideas and feelings, difficulty with transitions between activities, increased fighting with adults and/or peers, school performance changes, desire to be left alone, disordered eating (eating too little or too much), frequently getting into trouble at school or home, increased rate of headaches and stomachaches with no apparent cause, displaying behaviors belonging to younger children (bed wetting, fear of dark, thumb sucking)

3. Teens (Ages 13-18)

- a. Denying that trauma happened or discussing it frequently, not following rules and frequently talking back, increased fatigue, getting too much or too little sleep, engaging in risky behaviors, fighting, social withdrawal, substance use, running away from home

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/child-trauma.pdf>

Adjustments disorders and PTSD

It's normal for kids to react negatively to a stressful event. However, sometimes kids have unusually strong reactions to an event like a divorce, a move, or a scary health diagnosis. These strong reactions can look like depression, anxiety, behavioral problems or a combination of all of these. The symptoms render the child unable to cope and usually start right after the event and go away within six months of the stress dissipating. In this situation, the child may be said to have an adjustment disorder.

PTSD is similar to an adjustment disorder but the prompting event is usually more severe and the symptoms longer-lasting. However, both disorders create enough impairment in the lives of children that their daily lives are affected. PTSD is a result of a child reacting to "a real or perceived threat of harm or death to oneself, or by seeing or hearing about a loved one going through that kind of event". Adjustment disorders are unusually strong reactions to what can be considered normal yet stressful life events, whereas PTSD is a reaction to an abnormally stressful event.

If you think your child could benefit from help with dealing with these issues, please reach out to your child's school, principal, teacher, or office for a referral form for CPLA counseling. We are here to help!

for more information, please see
<https://childmind.org/article/what-are-adjustment-disorders/>



Helping children cope with a traumatic event

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, the comfort and assurance you provide a child can help them cope with grief, process their emotions, and ensure they recover in a healthy way. Here are ways you can help:

- **Make your child feel safe:** Give your child extra touch like cuddling or hugs. This will help them feel secure.
- **Act calm:** Do not discuss your anxieties about the traumatic event with or in front of the children. They look to you for reassurance.
- **Maintain routines:** Routines help children feel safe and less anxious because it makes life more predictable.
- **Help children enjoy themselves:** Encourage children to play or participate in activities they enjoy.
- **Share information about what happened:** Be direct and age appropriate about the traumatic event. Be honest and brief, allowing children to ask questions.
- **Pick good times to talk:** Look for natural openings and calm times to talk.
- **Reduce or prevent exposure to news coverage:** Young children may think that the trauma is never-ending if they see constant news coverage.
- **Understand that kids cope in ways different from adults:** Allow children to cope in the ways they find helpful.
- **Take time to listen and reflect:** Show your understanding and don't lecture.
- **Utilize breathing exercises to help children relax:** Breathing helps calm children.
- **Validate what your child is feeling:** Instead of saying "Don't be worried," say "I see that you are worried. I am here."
- **Do not give children too much responsibility:** Lower your expectations for responsibilities and don't burden kids with adult ones.
- **Watch for signs of trauma:** In the first month, it's normal for kids to feel numb. It's after the first month that symptoms of trauma may start to appear.
- **Know when to seek help:** If your child is hearing voices, seeing things that aren't there, wanting to harm themselves or others, is paranoid, or has panic attacks, please seek professional help.
- **Ensure you are taking care of yourself:** Make sure you are eating right, getting sleep, and receiving support. Recognize when you need help and don't be afraid to ask for it.

- Child Mind Institute

<https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-after-a-traumatic-event/>

There is hope after trauma

Children are resilient. But they need the support from parents, teachers, and sometimes professional clinicians to recover from trauma. Recovery is absolutely possible. If you feel like your child could benefit from receiving counseling services at their school, please reach out to a teacher, school principal, or main office to request a referral form. There is hope.



"They are masters at making sure you do not see them bleed." - Nancy Rappaport, MD regarding children who have been traumatized