

Coping with difficult experiences

Information for parents and carers



Sometimes children and young people might have a frightening or very stressful experience, like an accident, that leads to coming to hospital. Some children and young people might have a frightening experience in hospital, such as needing to have an emergency procedure. Going through difficult experiences is sometimes called a trauma.

Children and young people might be affected by trauma in different ways:

- They might find it hard to stop thinking about what happened
- There might be times where they feel the trauma is happening again
- They might have trouble sleeping or have nightmares
- They might feel very frightened or upset by things that remind them of what happened
- They might revert to behaving or talking in 'babyish' ways
- They might feel angry or show more difficult behaviours with family or friends or at school
- They might not want to talk or think about what happened
- They might lose interest in activities
- They might experience physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches.

Children might process the difficult experience through their play or drawings and this is a normal way for them to make sense of what has happened. All of these are common and understandable reactions. With some good support from family and friends, most children and young people begin to feel better after a few weeks.

How parents or carers can help their child



Parents can also be affected by difficult experiences after they have been through a scary experience. Parents might experience:

- Feeling anxious, stressed, irritable, numb, or like you are in a state of 'shock'
- Finding it difficult to accept what has happened and may act as if it has not happened
- Feeling 'on edge' a lot of the time
- Re-experiencing the traumatic event, often called a 'flashback'
- Finding it difficult to concentrate
- Having trouble sleeping or nightmares
- Feeling protective of others or very worried about them
- Avoiding thinking about the event
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or sadness
- Noticing physical symptoms like pains or feeling breathless.

These are difficult but normal ways for parents or other family members to feel after a traumatic experience. Most people begin to feel better after a few weeks with support from family and friends.

Taking care of yourself as a parent



Sometimes people need help to find ways to cope after a traumatic experience. If you or your child are continuing to find things difficult, you can speak with your GP or medical team and they can make a referral to the Paediatric Psychology and Liaison Service (PPALS).