

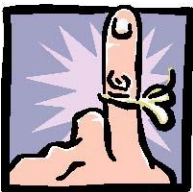
Home Management Strategies for PTSD

Step 1: Provide support and acceptance

Remember:

This is the first and most important step in helping your child manage his or her PTSD. Your child needs your love, support, and acceptance more than anything else! If your child feels accepted and understood by you, he or she may not develop PTSD, even after a serious trauma.

- Not all children and teens who experience a trauma will develop PTSD. If your child feels supported by the family afterward, he or she is less likely to have PTSD symptoms later on. So, as a first step, you can help your child by providing **lots of love and support**.
- As a parent having your child experience a trauma can also be very difficult for you. For example, you might blame yourself, and believe that you did not “protect” your child enough. Your first instinct might even be to leave your child alone for a bit and give him or her time and space alone to deal with what happened. However, children can misinterpret this to mean that you somehow blame them for what happened.



Tip #1: Be an active listener! Encourage your child to talk to you about what happened and any feelings he or she might have about the event. This can be an important part of your child’s recovery. For younger children who might have difficulty or be unable to talk about a trauma, encourage them to draw a picture or story about what happened.

Tip #2: Remind your child that it was not his or her fault, and provide lots of love!

Step 2: Teaching your child about anxiety & PTSD

- No matter what type of anxiety problem your child is struggling with, it is important that he or she understands the **facts about anxiety**.

Fact 1: Anxiety is a normal and adaptive system in the body that tells us when we are in danger.

Fact 2: Anxiety becomes a problem when our body tells us that there is danger when there is no real danger. Children and youth who have been traumatized often over-predict danger in future situations, when there is none.

- As an important first step, help your child to understand that all the worries and physical feelings have a name: **Anxiety**. This is especially important for children with PTSD, since the many symptoms of PTSD can feel very frightening.

To learn how to explain this to your child, see [How to Talk to Your Child about Anxiety.](#)

- Because PTSD can include very scary symptoms (such as nightmares, flashbacks, or vivid memories of the trauma), your child may be worried that he or she is going “crazy”. Take the time to explain that all these scary feelings are part of PTSD. Your child also needs to know that he or she is normal. The problem is **not** that your child is crazy! Rather, your child has anxiety, and there are skills that he or she can learn to deal with that anxiety.

Step 3: Building your child’s toolbox

Tool #1: Learning to calm anxiety by slowing down your breathing (see [Teaching Your Child Calm Breathing.](#))

Tool #2: Learning how to calm your anxiety by relaxing the muscles in your body (see [How to Do Progressive Muscle Relaxation.](#))

Children with PTSD are often very tense and jumpy throughout the day. Learning how to do relaxation can help them to reduce some of those anxious feelings in the body.

Tool #3: Getting Back to Routines

As a parent, it is important that you have your child return to normal activities as soon as possible after a traumatic event. Although it is normal to want to allow your child time alone, this is actually not helpful! Following a trauma, your child should be back in school within a few days (if possible), and continuing with his or her usual routine. This includes getting up and going to bed at the usual times, and participating in school or community activities (for example, sports teams, hobbies, visiting with friends).

Tool #4: Facing Fears

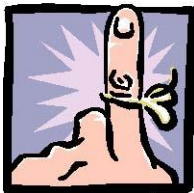
After your child has experienced a trauma, it will be your natural tendency to want to protect your child from any danger. Sometimes, however, this can become “overprotection”. By trying to protect your child, you might accidentally encourage or support his or her avoidance behavior. For example, your child might not want to get into a car (or even see a car) after having been in a car accident, and you as a parent might support your child in this decision, and not have him or her near any cars. Although this reaction is understandable, your child’s avoidance will not go away on its own. In fact, if your child is afraid of getting into cars today, this fear could get worse over time, and he or she might end up being afraid to even leave the house.

How You Can Help:

The best way to help your child is to encourage him or her to face the fear, rather than avoid it. That is, if your child is afraid to go to school, be around friends, be in crowds, go to shopping malls, or be in a car, then you can help to reduce that fear. See [Helping your Child to Face Fears: Exposure.](#) to help your child to gradually approach fearful situations. This should be done gradually, and with lots of praise and reward after each attempt.

Tool #5: Integrating Pleasant Events

- Since many children and teens with PTSD start to isolate themselves and avoid being around others, you can help to get back to normal routine by scheduling pleasant events into his or her life.

**Hint:**

Your child should always be involved in the decision of what pleasant things to do, and it is important that whatever you do, it is truly pleasant. In other words, there can be no reminders of the trauma when having fun.

Some examples of pleasant events might be:

- Going to the movies, the aquarium, or a video arcade.
- Going to the store (getting a new toy, going shopping).
- Playing in the park.
- Visiting over at a friend's house.
- Playing sports.
- Going bike riding.
- Going to the beach.

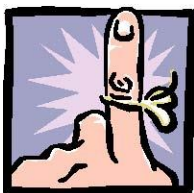
As a final point:

Although all of these tools can be very effective in helping you to manage your child's anxiety, sometimes it is not enough. Sometimes children and teens have very severe PTSD, and despite all your best efforts, he or she might still be struggling daily with anxiety symptoms. If this is the case, seek some professional help through a consult with your GP, psychiatrist, or a child psychologist/mental health worker.

Step 5: Building on Bravery

Your child's progress comes from hard work. If you are noticing improvements, both you and your child deserve credit! Learning to overcome anxiety is like exercise – your child needs to "keep in shape" and practice his or her skills regularly, and make them a habit. This is true even after your child is feeling better and has reached his or her goals.

Don't be discouraged if your child has lapses and returns to old behaviors every once in a while, especially during stressful times or transitions. This is normal, and just means that one or two tools in the toolbox need to be practiced again. Remember, coping with anxiety is a lifelong process.

**Hint:**

Occasionally, remind your child what he or she was not able to do before learning how to cope with anxiety and face fears. It can be very encouraging for your child to see how far he or she has come!