

CHILD TRAUMA

More than two-thirds of children report experiencing at least one traumatic event by age 16.

What Is Trauma for a Child?

- Loss/death of a loved one
- Parental separation or divorce
- Serious traffic accident
- Physical or emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Being bullied
- Witnessing violence at home or school
- Living with someone who has a mental health or substance misuse problem

Traumatic experiences can overwhelm a child's ability to cope, leading to traumatic stress with long-lasting impacts on their health, wellbeing, and future opportunities.

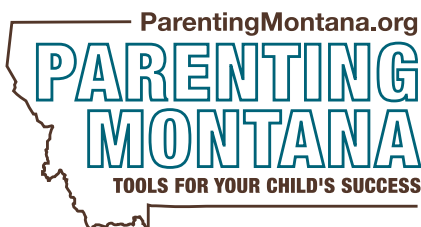
Reactions to Trauma Reminders or “Triggers” Can Happen at Any Age

Certain places, smells, sounds, times, or emotions can be triggers for a child, and every child may be different. These triggers remind of the traumatic experience and can elicit intense feelings, physical reactions, and sometimes challenging behaviors. These responses are not deliberate. They are the reflexes of a child who is experiencing the fight, flight, or freeze response in their brain.

Parents, and Those in a Parenting Role, Can Help Their Child Heal, Recover, and Thrive

You can lessen the effects of traumatic experiences and help your child

- feel safe,
- understand and manage their intense feelings and physical reactions,
- understand and manage difficult behaviors, and
- develop resilience.



Ways to Support Your Child's Healing and Recovery

- Make sure your child is in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment.
- Pay attention to your child's feelings cues like facial expressions, body movements, and sounds.
- Reassure your child that they are safe and that all their feelings are accepted.
- Consistently respond to and meet your child's needs.
- Keep consistent and predictable routines.
- Learn about the grief process, which is a normal reaction to trauma.
- Be open for your child to come talk to you at any time, but don't force them to share. Simply being present can be reassuring.
- Model good listening skills.
- Share your own feelings about the traumatic experience in an age-appropriate way. Modeling how to talk about feelings lets your child know that feelings can be shared.
- Practice ways to manage intense physical reactions and feelings like deep breathing.
- Help your child recognize and name their trauma triggers; this develops self-awareness.
- If your child experiences a trigger when you are with them, assure them they are safe in a calm voice and use another coping strategy like deep breathing with them slowly.
- Point out the resilience your child demonstrates when they work through intense feelings and physical reactions. Celebrating achievements together encourages more of the healthy behaviors.
- Take time to reflect before responding to your child's challenging behaviors. This extra time can help you remember to respond with empathy and connection.
- Remember to keep your relationship as the priority!

**Learn about
this and more at
ParentingMontana.org.**



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