

Health Awareness

What You Should Know About Child Traumatic Stress

(NAPSA)—While parents can't protect their children from everything, they can help them deal with traumatic events. The first step is to understand child traumatic stress.

Trauma is common in children's lives—by the age of 16 more than one in four children have experienced at least one traumatic event. Experiences such as a vicious dog attack, a serious car accident or a life-threatening illness can be traumatic for a child.

Sadly, the most common causes of child traumatic stress (CTS) are child abuse and death of a loved one, including a parent or sibling.

"After such events, it is common for children to blame themselves or wonder what they could have done to prevent a bad thing from happening to themselves or loved ones," said John Fairbank, Ph.D., of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). "By talking with children, adults can find out what is bothering children and correct any misperceptions that they were somehow at fault."

Many children are very resilient. Some children, such as those who have experienced previous traumatic events, may need more help overcoming a traumatic event. When traumatic stress persists, it can delay child development. It can lead to substance abuse, depression, problems with relationships, and can even prevent a child from succeeding in school.

The Effect of CTS

Traumatic stress can make daily life difficult for a child, who may be unable to focus on schoolwork during the day and unable to sleep at night. Images of the traumatic events may come back



Child traumatic stress is common—and treatable.

to the child's mind. Ordinary objects and places can become traumatic reminders. For example, a boy who was injured in a car accident may be reluctant to ride in the car. A girl who was treated for cancer may get upset when she smells disinfectant like that used in the hospital. To avoid these reminders, a child may withdraw from activities and relationships.

Adults Can Help

Bad things can happen to children no matter how protective their parents are. But a parent's support can help a child to recover. Take traumatic experiences seriously. Talk about them. Even when family members go through a traumatic event together, the experience will be different for each person and may be more troubling for children. If a child's traumatic stress reactions persist, then treatment may help.

Treatment for child traumatic stress has been shown to help traumatized children. A mental health professional experienced at working with traumatized children is best qualified to provide help. Often parents will need to participate in treatment for it to be most effective. For more information about child trauma and the NCTSN, visit their Web site at www.NCTSN.org.