



Chiropractic Newsletter

Well-Being

Moving Through Trauma

Three questions to help a child identify and heal from traumatic shocks

What, exactly, is trauma?

For psychologists and therapists, trauma is a biological, psychological, and social reaction to an event that was genuinely frightening.

One of the more routine causes of trauma in my practice as a psychologist is car crashes. A child can be traumatized after being in a scary wreck. Some children also develop a trauma response after learning that one of their parents was hurt in a serious collision. Even seeing a car crash happen while playing at the park can be traumatic for a child, particularly if something about the event is especially shocking, violent, or gruesome.

After any one of these scenarios, it would be perfectly normal for a child to have trouble sleeping or try to avoid riding in cars. However, these symptoms typically fade as part of the routine healing process. When the symptoms don't resolve, or maybe even get worse, we can confidently say that a child has been traumatized. The child was exposed to threatened death or serious injury, had a trauma response, and it interfered with the child's day-to-day life.

That's trauma.

Why is the parents' role so important in helping kids?

What I hope you take from this is the importance of the parent-child relationship, especially in healing from trauma. I would even go so far as to say a warm, nurturing relationship with a skilled caregiver is more valuable to a child's recovery than weekly therapy sessions with the most knowledgeable therapist in the world. In other



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words, you are the key to helping your child heal from and thrive after trauma.

This can sound like a heavy responsibility—you have the weight of a child's future resting on your shoulders. Don't worry! Parenting a traumatized child doesn't require therapist-level skills, sage-like wisdom, or supernatural levels of strength and patience. In fact, everything you need is inside you right now. The skills necessary to care for a child who has experienced an adverse event flow naturally from the parenting abilities and love that you already possess.

What are some specific ways parents can channel their instinct to nurture into effective support and healing?

One of the most important things parents can do to help their child is to validate their feelings. But what exactly does that mean? In the context of therapy, validation refers to the recognition that a patient's thoughts and feelings are legitimate and make sense. So too in the parenting realm: Your child's thoughts and feelings are valid. Here are some specific tips.

Pay attention

When your child is expressing an intense emotion, put your

phone down. Give the child your undivided attention. Often parents are uncomfortable with expressions of intense emotion—something that probably stems from their own childhood and how their parents responded to their intense distress. If this trepidation toward emotion feels familiar to you, remind yourself that intense feelings aren't a bad thing. They are just children's way of letting you know they need more support.

Provide accurate reflections

Try to put words to what your child is expressing. Don't mimic the child; just rephrase what the child is saying or expressing in your own words.

Guess at what hasn't been said aloud

Your child may not be sure what she's feeling, and by taking a guess you're showing her you are trying to understand her. You might also be helping her make sense of what thoughts or feelings are underlying her behavior.

Understand your child's behavior in terms of the child's trauma history

Show that you see the connection between the child's trauma responses and their underlying trauma experience.

Normalize emotional reactions

Strong, intense emotions can feel isolating. It helps to know that anyone in a similar situation could feel that way.

Exhibit radical genuineness

Really try to relate to and understand your child's strong emotions. Perhaps think back to a time you felt intensely about something.

—Melissa Goldberg Mintz

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