



After the injury: Helping my child cope

What should I expect after an injury?

In the first few days after an injury, your child might feel confused, upset, jumpy or worried. This is normal. Most children just need a little extra time to feel better.

When and where should I get help for my child?

If your child is still upset, jumpy or worried a few weeks after the injury talk to your child's doctor or school counsellor to find out the best way to help your child and family.

Things parents can do and say:

Do: Allow your child to talk about what happened if he or she wants to.

Say: "A lot has happened. Is there anything you're worried or confused about?"

Do: If your child doesn't want to talk about what happened, encourage him or her to draw a picture or write a story about it.

Say: (To younger children) "Can you draw a picture about what happened and tell me a story about it?"

Say: (To teenage children) "Can you write a story about what happened and how you're feeling?"

Do: Keep in mind that brothers and sisters could also feel upset or worried.

Say: "How are you doing? Is there anything you are worried about?"

Do: Maintain your child's regular meal and bed times. If sleep is a problem for your child, try a bedtime story and a favourite stuffed animal for younger children, some quiet time and relaxing music for teens.

Say: (To younger children) "Let's read your favourite book before going to bed."

Say: (To teenage children) "How about listening to music that helps you relax?"

Do: Talk to another adult if you are feeling upset about what happened to your child. Also, talk to your child's doctor if you are concerned about how he or she is dealing with the injury."

Say: "I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. It would help if I have someone to talk to for a little while."

Ways you can help your child after an injury:

- **Let your children know they are safe.** Give them extra hugs (even your teens).
- **Allow children to talk about their feelings and worries, if they want to.** Let them know that being a little scared and upset is normal. If they don't want to talk, they could write a story or draw a picture.
- **Go back to everyday routines.** Help your child get enough sleep, eat regularly, keep up with school, and – as much as the injury allows – go back to doing usual things with friends.

- **Increase time with family and friends.** Children who get extra support from family and friends seem to do better after upsetting events. Try reading, playing games or watching a movie together.
- **Take time to deal with your own feelings.** It will be harder to help your child if you are worried or upset. Talk about your feelings with other adults, such as family, friends, clergy, your doctor or a counsellor.
- **Keep in mind that people in the same family can react in different ways.** Remember your child's feelings and worries about the injury might be different from yours. Brothers and sisters can feel upset too, even if they were not involved.

Coping after my child's injury

Are my reactions and feelings normal?

In the first few weeks, parents often feel upset, worried and more stressed. This is normal. Dealing with a sudden event and taking care of your child's physical injuries can be a difficult and unexpected disruption to day-to-day family life. These worries and stresses usually get better with a little time and with support from family and friends.

When and where should I get help?

- if your feelings make it hard to get back to (or enjoy) your usual activities,
- if you find it hard to talk with your child about what happened,
- if you seem to be getting worse rather than better, or
- if reactions that bother you last more than a month.

Your doctor may be able to suggest a professional counsellor or therapist in your area who can help.

Ways to take care of yourself:

- **Take time to take care of yourself.** Try to get enough sleep and eat regularly.
- **Use your support system.** Talk with people you trust (family, friends, clergy, your doctor) about how you are feeling.
- **Ask for practical help if you need it.** Let others know how they can best be of help to you and your family. Do you need meals? Child care?
- **Try to keep (or get back to) normal routines.** It can be especially helpful to return to activities that you and your family enjoy.
- **Be aware of your own feelings and reactions.** Some parents find it upsetting to talk with their child about what happened, or they feel anxious or overprotective when their child starts to return to normal activities. If this is true for you, be sure to get support for yourself so that you can best help your child.
- **Watch out for problematic ways of dealing with stress.** Be especially careful not to increase smoking or alcohol use when you are feeling worried, upset or stressed.

Produced by: Psychological Medicine CAHS 0696 Rev. 1 May 2016

Information sourced from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
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