

## *Common Reactions by Adolescents to Trauma and How a Parent Can Provide Support*

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### **Symptoms of Distress Following Trauma:**

- Efforts to distance from emotions.
- Sudden drive to be involved with others and lots of activity.
- Withdrawal from others and activities.
- Accident proneness.
- Being startled easily.
- Disruptions in sleep and/or eating patterns; nightmares.
- Sexual acting out or other reckless behaviors.
- Intrusive imagery and memories; flashbacks.
- Vulnerability to depression and pessimistic outlook on the world.
- Loss of interest in activities.
- Magical explanations to fill in gaps in understanding.
- Complaints about bodily aches, pains, or illness with no medical explanation.
- Visual images and unpleasant memories that will invade the child's mind (but the child will rarely talk of this odd occurrence).
- Fear of the trauma happening again.
- Repeated retelling of the event.
- Bedwetting or other toileting accidents.
- Disruptions in sleep patterns; nightmares, sleepwalking, etc.
- Regressing to the behavior of a younger child.

**Courtesy of The Counseling Place  
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### **How You Can Help:**

- Encourage younger and older adolescents to talk about the event with family members.
- Provide opportunities for your child to spend time with supportive friends.
- Encourage fun physical activities, such as sports, yoga, martial arts, or dancing.
- Monitor your child's coping at home, at school, and among peers.
- Explain to your child that he/she might experience a wide range of strong emotions – guilt, shame, vengeance, and embarrassment— and reassure him/her that this is normal following a trauma.
- If you see signs of depression, accident proneness, personality changes, self-destructiveness or recklessness, take them seriously and seek professional help.
- If your child is fearful, avoid separations from important caregivers unless it's unavoidable.
- Maintain routines that the family has established, including everyday household activities.
- Be patient and listen to the child's retelling of the event. Listen for signs that the child's retelling of the event. Listen for signs that the child might misunderstand the incident, especially when the misunderstanding involves self-blame or magical thinking.
- Provide extra nighttime comforts when possible: stuffed animals, nightlights, and physical comforting after nightmares. Allow the child to try new ways to cope with fear at bedtime: extra reading time, leaving a light or radio on.
- Avoiding exposing the child to things that will remind him/her of the trauma (movies/stories, physical locations that resemble the place where trauma occurred).
- Be open to seeking professional help for the child.

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Modified from *Children and Trauma: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* by Cynthia Mohahon. 1993.