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How to Help a Child With PTSD

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A child that experiences PTSD or post traumatic stress disorder is not likely to come out and tell you they have a problem. But, often times, they exhibit signs that a watchful parent, guardian, or foster parent should look for. Perhaps a child that has witnessed a shooting will suddenly show a fascination with shooting games or a teen that has witnessed a school shooting will abruptly begin talking about taking a gun to school themselves.

Depending on how traumatic the stressor is, studies show that girls tend to develop post traumatic stress syndrome more than boys do. But, the qualifier that helps determine how radical the symptoms are include the parents reactions to the traumatic situation. Having parents that show resilience and perseverance, lack of open suffering, and open communication help a child through the difficult times that follow a traumatic situation. Many people mistakenly think they shouldn't discuss the traumatic event with a child because it would be too hurtful to remember it again. However, the child needs to be taught different ideas about the trauma. For example, after witnessing a shooting or war events, the child may be thinking that the world is an unsafe place and that nothing good is ever going to happen again. Thinking about the trauma needs to be compartmentalized and thought about during a relaxed moment so that the child need not fear the memories.

Letting children know that their reactions are normal and expected are key in helping children with PTSD. For both teens and school age children, showing comfort and support, listening when they want to talk and referring them to professionals when the symptoms become inappropriate or dangers are the best things you can do for them. For younger children, a consistent loving atmosphere, a professional with experience with play therapy with younger children and routine follow through are helpful in assisting the child in overcoming the traumatic situations that scarred them early in life.

By keeping a watchful eye and responding early to the symptoms, a loving family, watchful teachers, and experienced therapists can help a child who has seen to much early in life overcome their experiences and move on to a happier childhood.

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