

# Trauma 101 for Teens & Pre-Teens

## What is Trauma?

Trauma, or traumatic stress, is an emotional, physical, or behavioral reaction to a distressing situation. Common traumatic events are natural disasters, abuse, discrimination, severe accidents or illness, or the sudden death of someone you care about. Over 2/3 of youth have gone through a traumatic event by age 16, although not all of them experience serious symptoms of traumatic stress.

## What about Secondary Trauma?

Secondary trauma is when we experience significant traumatic stress after hearing about someone else's traumatic experience, for example, when you learn about something traumatic from a friend, from social media, or when it happens in your community. Secondary trauma can feel just as hard as direct trauma, and recognizing it does not "take away" from other trauma survivors.

### Traumatic stress in teens and pre-teens might look like:

- Shame about your actions during or reactions after the traumatic event
- Feeling guilty or insecure
- Disconnecting from friends and hobbies
- Seeing the world in a more negative way
- Fantasizing about revenge
- Risky or self-destructive behaviors
- Feeling depressed or alone
- Trouble with eating, or harming yourself
- Alcohol or drug use

**Remember:** Traumatic stress can look different in everyone! Trauma responses are *normal* reactions to *terrible* incidents.

### What helps with traumatic stress?

- Keeping up with self-care like getting proper exercise, nutrition, and sleep
- Expressing your feelings to friends and trusted adults, or through activities like journaling or art
- Hanging out or talking on the phone with supportive friends and family
- Returning to normal home, school, and extracurricular routines as much as possible
- Going outside, even if it's just to walk around outside for a few minutes
- Limiting news and social media intake
- Remembering it's normal to feel different for a while after a traumatic event, so show yourself some compassion!

*Most people will move past a traumatic event in time, but getting formal support can really help to process what you've gone through.*



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**Sources:** Administration for Children & Families; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; Copeland et al., 2007; Follette, Polusny & Milbeck, 1994; Thompson et al., 2019.

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