

THE FAMILY ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

The family is the most important part of a child's life. Parents give them their security and confidence. What trauma means to a child depends to a large extent on how their parents react to it. Often this is more important than what happens to the children themselves. Do not be surprised if their reactions seem out of keeping with their experiences.

Children (even infants and toddlers) always know more than we give them credit for. They are aware of many things they cannot put into words for us.

Because they are not talking doesn't mean they are not thinking about things.

Children need to make sense of things that happen. Because they don't have all the facts and their thinking is not yet mature, they use imagination to fill the gaps.



Often this results in misunderstandings or wrong ideas, which they may keep to themselves.

What they imagine is usually more frightening than what really happened.

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

These are some of the changes that can be seen in children under stress:

- Sleep problems, nightmares
- Changes in eating and toilet habits
- Clinging to family or familiar things, needing objects for security
- Unable to cope with change or ordinary problems
- Reverting to old habits or out-grown behaviours
- Changes in relationships with parents, either more demanding, possessive, or becoming withdrawn, incommunicative, rejecting
- Relationships with brothers, sisters and peers become more difficult with conflict, competition, aggression or withdrawal
- Preoccupation with the trauma, wanting to talk about it, playing it out, wanting to see where it happened
- Excessive concern for others, holding back their needs to protect adults
- Reduced school performance, concentration or ability to play constructively
- Over-active behavior, restlessness, dissatisfaction
- Small ailments or injuries used to get comfort or security
- Transitions such as from pre-school to school may be more difficult

THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Don't assume you know what the child understands of trauma but find it out by talking, listening and observing the child. According to their stage of development, children have a narrower focus and only take in some aspects of the situation. Their understanding is often limited fragmentary or even distorted.

Reassurance does not help until the child has an accurate idea of the event, and its causes, and their misconceptions have been corrected.

When someone you know is involved in a trauma, children may be distressed and imagine how it would have been for themselves but they usually express their feelings indirectly. They may feel their own security is threatened.

Sometimes the trauma makes it hard to deal with ordinary problems. Children don't usually tell adults about these things, because they feel too self-conscious, are afraid, or they can't put them into words.

