



THE  
**HOUSSON CENTER**  
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

8100 Lomo Alto Dr., Suite 100 · Dallas, Texas 75225  
Office: (214) 351-0053 · Fax: (214) 351-5581

## PTSD In Children

When we think about post-traumatic stress disorder most of us probably picture a soldier who has been in combat. In fact anyone — including children — can develop **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**, because anyone can experience trauma. However, not everyone who experiences trauma goes on to develop PTSD, even if they are showing the early signs of what looks like the disorder. Anyone can experience an event and have a natural recovery period. PTSD is diagnosed when a child is stuck in the recovery period.

### Statistics

- If a child is still struggling one month after a traumatic event, they might have post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Symptoms

- Unusual irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Being easily startled
- Nightmares
- Difficulty sleeping
- Significant change in mood
- Significant change in the way she views the world, her relationships, or herself
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Seeming detached or estranged from others

## Some Common Examples of Traumatic Events:

- Car accident
- Natural disaster
- School shooting
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Domestic violence
- Community violence
- The death of a family member
- Displacement from the home

## Treatment

<p><b>Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy, or TF-CBT, is considered the gold standard treatment for children and adolescents with PTSD. TF-CBT has several components, the first being teaching a child and their parents about what trauma looks like.</li><li>● A major part of this is helping children learn how to better understand their thinking, and how their thinking affects how they feel and what they do.</li><li>● Treatment moves on to helping them talk about their trauma in as much detail as possible. Children may want to avoid talking about what happened, or gloss over it, either because it makes them feel safer not to think about it or because they are trying to protect other people, like parents.</li></ul>	<p><b>Prolonged Exposure Therapy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● This treatment is designed to help people stop avoiding thinking about their traumatic experience or anything that might remind them of it.</li><li>● Slowly and with the assistance of the clinician, they begin to gradually habituate to the things they have been avoiding.</li></ul>	<p><b>Cognitive Processing Therapy:</b></p> <p>In CPT, clinicians help a child examine how their beliefs have changed. They talk through those thoughts and break down what's true and what isn't. The goal in the end is to help them develop a healthier view of what happened so that they can move past it.</p>
---	---	---

## How Can I Help My Child?

- **Help your child feel safe.** They may need extra time, comfort, and care from you for a while.
- **Help your child relax.** Invite them to take a few slow breaths with you. Breathe in while you count to 3. Breathe out while you count to 5.
- **Do things together that you enjoy.** Trauma can make it harder to feel the positive emotions that naturally help kids recharge. Play, laugh, enjoy nature, make music or art, cook. These activities can reduce stress and build your child's resilience.
- **Reassure your child.** Let them know they will get through this. And that you are there to help.
- **Let your child's doctor know** what your child has been through. Get a referral to a mental health professional (like a psychiatrist, psychologist, or mental health counselor who specializes in trauma therapy).
- **Tell your child's teacher** that your child went through a trauma. Kids with PTSD may have more trouble focusing on schoolwork. Ask for your child to have extra help or more time to do schoolwork if they need it for a while.

## Resources:

- [PTSD in Children: Symptoms, Causes, and Treatments | Psych Central](#)
- [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in Children | CDC](#)
- [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\) in Children - Stanford Medicine Children's Health \(stanfordchildrens.org\)](#)
- [What Is PTSD? - Child Mind Institute](#)
- [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\) in Children - Health Encyclopedia - University of Rochester Medical Center](#)
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\) in Children and Teens | CHOC](#)

## Extra Helpful Resources (Books)

- *The Whole Brain Child* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.
- *How to Talk so Little Kids Will Listen* by Joanna Faber and Julie King
- *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish
- *No-Drama Discipline; the Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture your Child's Developing Mind* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.

- *Breaking Free of Child Anxiety and OCD* by Eli R. Lebowitz, Ph.D.
- *Freeing your Child from Anxiety* by Tamar E. Chansky, Ph.D.