

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children & Teens

What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder, often referred to as PTSD, develops in some people who have experienced something traumatic. People often think of PTSD with war veterans, but this disorder can impact any person who experiences something scary or shocking, including children.

We all experience fear as a part of life and most people recover from the initial symptoms they experience after a traumatic event. A child or teen who continues to struggle with fear or stress, even when they are not in danger, may need professional treatment to help them heal from the experience and learn how to cope with the feelings.

There are various types of physical and mental traumas that can cause PTSD, such as a serious car accident, abuse, the sudden death of a loved one, bullying, parental divorce, exposure to violence, natural disasters, and many other types of life experiences. **Any situation that a person considers traumatic can cause PTSD—and this looks differently for each person.**

PTSD may develop in someone immediately following the trauma or it may show up much later in life.

Signs & Symptoms

It can be difficult for a child to understand and explain what they are feeling so it's very important for caregivers to pay close attention to behaviors. Children and teens struggling with PTSD may be experiencing a range of emotional or physical distress.

Some of the most common symptoms include:

- Difficulty sleeping or having bad dreams
- Feeling anxious, nervous, restless or fidgety
- Becoming irritated, angry, aggressive or violent
- Returning to outgrown behaviors (such as thumb-sucking or bedwetting)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
- Acting detached or unable to show affection
- Headaches or stomach aches
- Constantly worrying about dying
- Avoiding people, places or things that bring back memories
- Having flashbacks or reliving the experience over and over



Our Locations

KANSAS CITY

4300 Brenner Dr.
Kansas City, KS 66104

WICHITA

1507 W. 21st St. N.
Wichita, KS 67203

HAYS

205 E 7th St.
Hays, KS 67601

What You Can Do to Help

There are many ways you can help a child or teen who is struggling with PTSD. Every child is different, so it's important to pay attention to their responses and understand what they find comfort in. We recommend trying these supportive approaches:

- **Acknowledge that the traumatic event happened.** If you pretend it didn't happen or try to downplay its impact, that could further traumatize the child.
- **Listen closely if they want to open up and talk to you about it.** Let them express their feelings about the event without judgment. But if they don't want to talk about it, give them space and don't force them.
- **Be gentle, calm, patient and compassionate.** Do not become angry or hostile toward them as that could scare them further.
- **Speak to their teachers and school counselors** to ensure they know what has happened and that the child may need additional support at school.
- **Seek professional help.** It's important to have a physician or licensed mental health professional examine the child for an accurate assessment and diagnosis of their physical and mental health.
- **If the child displays any symptoms of self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts, call 911 immediately.** Take these symptoms very seriously and get them help as soon as possible.



Contact KVC Hospitals for Support

KVC Hospitals is a network of nonprofit children's psychiatric hospitals and residential treatment centers serving youth ages 6 to 18. Each year, we give thousands of youth a safe place to heal, build resilience, and overcome struggles with behavioral and mental health challenges. Our compassionate team of psychiatric, medical and behavioral health professionals provides a nurturing and therapeutic experience along with a treatment plan tailored to meet each child's individual needs. The goal of our treatment programs is for each child to safely return home with the resources and supports in place to live a healthy and happy life in their community.

If you're concerned that a child in your care is struggling with PTSD or other mental health needs, **call KVC Hospitals at 913-890-7468.** We're available 24/7 to answer your questions.

Here's a list of additional resources you can contact for help:

- Call the child's primary care physician or your local community mental health center
- Text HOME to 741741 for 24/7 support from the Crisis Text Line
- Call the National Alliance on Mental Illness helpline at 800-950-6264, which is staffed by volunteers who have mental health conditions
- Call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255