

Stratford High School Student Services
Kelly Wilson, Social Worker, Stratford High School
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EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON TEENS

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

Adolescents age 12-17 may:

- Experience nightmares or other sleep problems
- Avoid reminders of the event
- Abuse drugs, alcohol, or tobacco
- Act disruptive, disrespectful, or destructive
- Have somatic physical complaints
- Feel isolated or depressed
- Lose interest in hobbies or interests
- Have suicidal thoughts

It is of utmost importance to offer extra reassurance and support following/while experiencing a traumatic event. An adolescent's reaction to trauma is greatly influenced by their parents' response, so it is important to educate yourself about trauma and traumatic stress. The more you know about the symptoms, effects, and treatment options, the better equipped you will be to help them manage through/recover. With your love and support, the unsettling thoughts and feelings of traumatic stress can become more manageable.

Managing Trauma

Tip #1 MINIMIZE MEDIA EXPOSURE

Minimize media exposure as you deem appropriate-while it is important to be educated on information provided to the public regarding a crisis, excessive exposure to a disturbing event can exacerbate/create traumatic stress.

Manage your teen's exposure to media before bed and make use of parental controls to prevent your teen from repeatedly viewing disturbing news footage.

As much as you can, watch news reports of crisis coverage with your teen, you can help support them as you are watching to help place the information in context

Tip #2: ENGAGE YOUR TEEN

Do your best to create an environment where your teen feels safe to communicate what they are feeling and to ask questions.

Simply spending time together, talking face to face, free from TV and other social media distractions can alleviate traumatic stress.

Provide your child with ongoing opportunities to talk about what they are feeling or seeing in the media.

Encourage them to ask questions but do not force them to talk.

Acknowledge and validate your teen's concerns. Comfort for your child comes from feeling understood and accepted by you, so acknowledge their fears even if they do not seem to connect to you.

Reassure your teen that you love them and it is ok to feel upset, scared, angry.

It can be very difficult for some teens to talk about their feelings so do not pressure them to talk, just be available to them.

Be honest. Tailor the information you share in knowing your child best, however do not say nothing is wrong, if something *is* wrong.

Tip #3: ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical Activity can release mood-enhancing endorphins, burn off adrenaline, and help your teen sleep better at night. Any approved (by your teen's physician, you, and the CDC) activity (walking, playing in an outdoor yard or a park, indoor calisthenics) that you feel your teen will enjoy can be helpful.

Tip #4: FEED YOUR TEEN A HEALTHY DIET

The food your teen eats can have an enormous impact on their ability to cope with traumatic stress.

Processed food, sugary snacks and drinks, and refined carbohydrates can create mood swings and exacerbate symptoms of traumatic stress.

Eating fresh fruit, high-quality protein, health fats, and vegetables can help with up and down moods that can occur with experienced traumatic stress.

Focus on providing minimal processed food.

Limit fried food, sugary snacks, cereals, refined flour, sweet desserts, all which can exacerbate symptoms of traumatic stress.

Cook more meals at home rather than ordering out.

Make mealtimes an opportunity to talk and listen to your teen without the distractions of computers, phones, or TV.

Tip #5: PROVIDE AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST AND SAFETY

Trauma can affect the way your teen sees the world-making it seem like a much more frightening and dangerous place, making it more difficult to trust their environment and other people. It is important to help stabilize your child's sense of security and safety.

Create or Maintain routines-for school work, meals, and family activities.

Allow for your teen to have their own time for rest and fun.

Manage your own stress-the more calm, focused, and relaxed you are, the more available you will be to support your teen.

Speak of the future-making plans for the future can help counteract the feeling that the future is unpredictable, bleak, and scary.

Be consistent and follow through with what you say you are going to do.

If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it, this will encourage your teen's trust in you.

The following are **Community Resources** for your access:

- CDC Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Information on Stratford communication regarding COVID-19:
[https://www.stratfordk12.org/district info/coronavirus-information-and-resources](https://www.stratfordk12.org/district%20info/coronavirus-information-and-resources)
- Police Emergency: 911
- Stratford Police Department: +1 (203) 385-4100
- Info Line: 211
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (1-800-273-8255)

