

Adolescents and Trauma

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Adolescents exposed to trauma such as violence, death, accidents, or disasters are likely to show signs of stress. Adolescents are likely to exhibit some of the following symptoms. If symptoms do not decrease in severity after a few weeks you are encouraged to seek professional assistance.

Common Adolescent Reactions

- Nightmares and night terror
- Nervous behavior
- Worry over safety of loved ones
- Confusion
- Irritability
- Physical complaints
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Poor concentration
- Suppression of emotion
- Anger or rage
- Risk-taking behavior
- Substance use
- Talk of retaliation
- Shifts in peer group
- Focus on death
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Increased sense of alienation

Warning Signs: When to Seek Professional Help

- Any substance use or abuse
- Extended periods of depression
- Ongoing loss of interest in daily activities
- Acting much younger for extended periods
- Excessive imitating of the dead person
- Statements about or acts of self harm
- Ongoing wish to join the dead person
- Withdrawal from friends
- Sharp drop in school performance
- Refusal to attend school or major events
- Dramatic change in eating and/or sleeping
- Violent or threatening behavior

(continued)

Parents and caregivers can help

- Provide assurance that he/she is protected
- Offer support as they interpret the events
- Be direct and give honest information
- Be tolerant of symptoms of stress reactions
- Watch for and correct his/her self-blame
- Be available and encourage questions
- Develop and/or review safety plans
- Encourage healthy ways to cope
- Acknowledge normal feelings and reaction
- Help identify, label and express feelings



*Funded by the
Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)*

For additional information, please contact:

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| ▶ Connecticut Helps, Office of Family Support | (860) 418-6262 |
| ▶ United Way Infoline | 2-1-1 |
| ▶ Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services | (800) 446-7348 |
| ▶ Connecticut Department of Children and Families | (860) 550-6484 |
| ▶ Connecticut Clearinghouse | (800) 232-4424 |

Information Provided by:
New York State
Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse
Services
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