

# COMMON STRESS REACTIONS IN CHILDREN

## Age 0 - 2

Cannot understand the traumatic event but they know when their caregiver is upset. They may start to show the same emotions as their caregiver, or may act differently, like crying for no reason, withdrawing from people, and not playing with their toys.

## Age 3 – 5

Can understand the effects of the traumatic event. They have trouble adjusting to change and loss. They may depend on the adults around them to help them feel better.

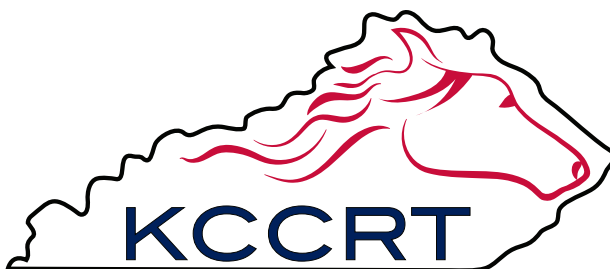
## Age 6 – 10

May fear going to school and stop spending time with friends. They may have trouble paying attention and do poorly in school. Some may become aggressive for no clear reason. Others may act younger than their age – asking to be fed, helped getting dressed or reverting back to thumb sucking and refusing to sleep alone.

## Age 11 – 19

Are going through a lot of emotional and physical changes and may have a more difficult time coping with trauma. Older teens may try to ignore or try to hide their reactions, responding “I’m okay” or even remain silent when they are upset. They may complain about physical aches or pains because they cannot identify what is really bothering them emotionally. Some may become more argumentative at home and school, resisting any structure or authority. They may also engage in risky behaviors such as using alcohol or drugs.

*Adapted from Source: SAMHSA., 2019  
Revised KCCRB 2019*



KENTUCKY COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

*We provide the entire spectrum of critical incident stress management (CISM) services from pre-incident training, acute crisis response, and post-incident support to emergency services personnel who have encountered a traumatic event. Traumatic events include: line of duty deaths, multi-casualty incidents, use of deadly force, suicide of a first responder, events involving children, prolonged incidents, terrorism, and any other overwhelming event.*

*Additionally, Kentucky Community Crisis Response Board (KCCRB) coordinates acute multi-component crisis support services and specialized training to schools, communities and organizations outside the emergency services field.*

*These services are provided at no cost in attempts to prevent the destructive effects of emotional trauma, job related stress, and accelerate recovery from critical incidents before stress reactions can negatively impact an individual's career, health and family.*

**-Office-**  
502-607-5781

**-website-**  
<http://kccrb.ky.gov>

**-Request a Response Team-**  
**24 hours a day**  
888-522-7228

**You can find us on**



## COMMON STRESS REACTIONS

### PHYSICAL / BODY

Following a traumatic event, individuals can experience a variety of reactions. The following is a brief listing of frequently reported reactions.

- fatigue • muscle tremors/twitches • nausea • elevated blood pressure • thirst • nonspecific body complaints • headaches • loss or increase in appetite • dizziness • rapid heart rate • vomiting\* • physical weakness\* • difficulty breathing\* • chest pain\* • shock symptoms\*

\*Indicates need for medical evaluation

### COGNITIVE / MIND

- confusion • poor concentration • nightmares, distressing dreams or intrusive images • overly cautious • preoccupation with the event • poor decision making/problem solving • disturbed thinking • difficulty with recall • worry • uncertainty

### SPIRITUAL REACTIONS

- Crisis of faith • doubt • preoccupation • questioning beliefs or values

### EMOTIONS / FEELINGS

- shock • anger • anxiety • guilt • grief • panic • denial • fear • emotional outburst • intense anger • irritability • agitation • sadness • loss of emotional control • feeling overwhelmed • feeling numb or cold • intense worry about others • feeling isolated

### BEHAVIORAL / ACTIONS

- inability to rest/relax • change in sleep patterns • risk taking • avoidance • change in socialization • withdrawal/isolation • ambivalence • increase in alcohol and/or drug consumption • change in sexual functioning • hyper alert to surroundings • increased confrontational encounters

Source: International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc., 1995  
Revised KCCRB 2019

## TAKE CONTROL OF STRESS

### INCREASE YOUR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Basic activities can help reduce stress reactions.

- ▶ For example, walking, biking, swimming, etc.

### LIMIT YOUR MEDIA EXPOSURE

Constant exposure to the incident through media may continue to trigger negative reactions.

- ▶ For example, TV, radio, social media, newspapers, etc.

### RESIST THE DESIRE TO WITHDRAW

Stay connected to your support network.

- ▶ Family, friends, co-workers, support groups, faith-based

### SLEEP AND DIET

The better rested and nourished you are, the better equipped you are to tackle your stress.

- ▶ Maintain a healthy diet
- ▶ Limit caffeine and screen time before going to sleep

### BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

You are healing. You may not be ready to resume all previous responsibilities.

- ▶ Allow yourself to feel whatever you're feeling without judgment or guilt.
- ▶ Structure your time but recognize your limits.
- ▶ There is no "right" or "wrong" way to respond.

### GET INVOLVED

Becoming a participant is a good way to reduce stress and may alleviate the sense of helplessness.

- ▶ Volunteer in your community.
- ▶ Join a recreational sports league.

### SET SHORT RANGE GOALS

Goals provide a sense of direction during a time of confusion and uncertainty.

- ▶ Re-establish routine.

- ▶ Do something everyday that gives you a sense of accomplishment.

### AVOID THE USE OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Neither helps you to actually manage your stress.

- ▶ Generally, what is relaxing about having a "beer with a friend" is the social contact not the drink itself.
- ▶ Numbing your feelings is a temporary solution that is only interfering with your effective coping.

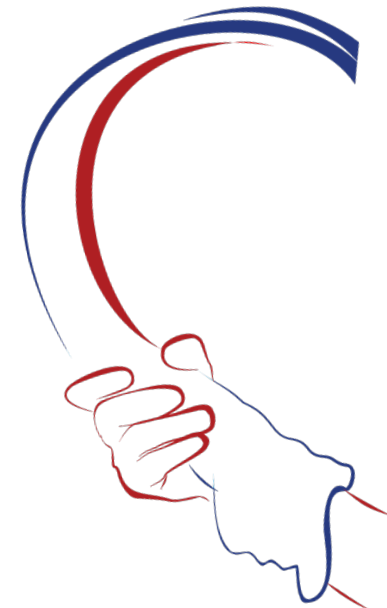
### PRACTICE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Identify relaxation techniques that have worked for you in the past.

- ▶ For example, deep breathing, meditation, yoga, hobbies, etc.

### DECISION MAKING

Don't make any major life changes or decisions in the next couple of months.



*If your symptoms persist or become worse, seek professional assistance.*