



# Tips for Parents:

## Help infants and toddlers following a trauma

IF YOUR CHILD,	UNDERSTAND	WAYS TO HELP
<p>... has problems sleeping, doesn't want to go to bed, won't sleep alone, or wakes up at night screaming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When children are scared they want to be with people who help them feel safe, and they worry when you are not together.</li> <li>• If you were separated during the trauma, going to bed alone may remind your child of that separation.</li> <li>• Bedtime is a time for remembering because we are not busy doing other things. People often dream about things they fear and can be scared of going to sleep.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you want, let your child sleep with you. Let him know this is temporary.</li> <li>• Have a bedtime routine: stories, a prayer, cuddle time. Tell him the routine (every day), so he knows what to expect.</li> <li>• Hold him and tell him that he is safe; that you are here and will not leave. Understand that he is not being difficult on purpose. This may take time, but when he feels safer, he will sleep better.</li> </ul>
<p>... worries something bad will happen to you. (You may also have worries like this.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is natural to have fears like this after being in danger.</li> <li>• These fears may be even stronger if your child was separated from loved ones during the trauma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind your child (and yourself) that right now you are safe.</li> <li>• If you are not safe, talk about how you are working to keep her safe.</li> <li>• Make a plan for who would care for your child if something did happen to you. This may help you worry less.</li> <li>• Do positive activities together to help keep her mind off of the trauma.</li> </ul>
<p>... cries or complains whenever you leave him, even when you go to the bathroom.</p> <p>... can't stand to be away from you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children who cannot yet speak or say how they feel may show their fear by clinging or crying.</li> <li>• Goodbyes may remind your child of any separation you had related to the trauma.</li> <li>• Children's bodies react to separations (stomach sinks, heart beats faster). Something inside says, "Oh no, I can't lose her."</li> <li>• Your child is not trying to manipulate or control you. He is scared.</li> <li>• He may also get scared when other people (not just you) leave. Goodbyes make him scared.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to stay with your child and avoid separations right now.</li> <li>• For brief separations (store, bathroom) help your child by naming his feelings and linking them to what he has been through. Let him know you love him and that this goodbye is different, and that you will be back soon. "You're so scared. You don't want me to go because last time we weren't together you didn't know where I was. This is different, and I'll be right back."</li> <li>• For longer separations have him stay with familiar people, tell him where you are going, why and when you will come back. Let him know you will think about him. Leave a photo or something of yours and call if you can. When you come back, tell him you missed him, thought about him and did come back. You will need to say repeatedly.</li> </ul>
<p>... has problems eating, eats too much or refuses food.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress affects your child in different ways, including her appetite.</li> <li>• Eating healthy is important; but focusing too much on eating can cause stress and tension in your relationship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relax. Usually, as your child's level of stress goes down, her eating habits will return to normal. Don't force your child to eat.</li> <li>• Eat together and make meal times fun and relaxing.</li> <li>• Keep healthy snacks around. Young children often eat on the go.</li> <li>• If you are worried, or if your child loses a significant amount of weight, consult a pediatrician</li> </ul>