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What Can I Do

To Support My Child Who Has Been Exposed to Violence?

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Children can be exposed to violence as direct victims, or as witnesses. This type of stress can impact their health and well-being. However, with the right support from key people in their lives, many children exposed to trauma can thrive. YOU can be that key person for your child.

When children and youth have safe, nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers who are warm, engaged and in-tune with their children's needs, children can develop *resiliency* – in other words, the safety of your relationship can act as a buffer to the impacts of trauma. Sharing a loving bond with your child is a critical element of their healing.

However, when parents and children have both been impacted by stress and violence (in the past or present), being consistently nurturing, engaged and in-tune with your child can be challenging. This can be challenging for all parents, with or without stress and violence! Some parents need support re-connecting with their children after trauma. This is not because they are bad parents. It's common for stress and trauma to impact our relationships with loved ones. **The good news is: parent-child relationships can heal, helping both of you recover.**

Here are some ideas to help strengthen your loving connection with your child:

- Use feeling words – give names to your emotions and your child's emotions.
- Spend quality time together – even if you can only be focused with your child for 10 minutes at a time, this time adds up. Play, talk, laugh, walk, eat together, etc.
- Develop daily routines – this can provide a feeling of predictability and safety for children and youth of all ages. If life feels too hectic for routines, start small with one daily routine. Try routines that have nurturing built in, such as talking about one positive memory while eating dinner or before bed.
- Notice – why is my child grumpy right now? Is she tired, bored, over-stimulated, hungry, hurt feelings, etc. You can take a guess and ask, "You seem a little grumpy? I wonder if you're hungry, and if eating something might help you feel better?" If you get it wrong, your child will be happy to correct you!
- Notice – why am I grumpy right now? Am I tired, bored, over-stimulated, hungry, hurt feelings, etc. Is something going on that's bringing up hard feelings from my own past? You can say "I am feeling grumpy. I think it's because I'm hungry. I'm going to eat something and see if that helps." Taking care of YOU is the first step.



- Do community activities together – the more people and places that children and youth feel connected to, the better they do. Go to the library, your rec center, your park, church activities, etc. Some neighborhoods don't have these things close by, or the neighborhood doesn't feel safe. If that's the case, consider reaching out to friends and neighbors who you trust. Maybe they have ideas, or together you can create your own shared activities.
- If you need extra help supporting your child to recover, seek help from professionals trained in childhood trauma, and talk with trusted friends & family.