GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT TYPICAL
REACTIONS TO UPSETTING EVENTS

After an overwhelming or traumatic event, there can be a period of time when children and adults may feel more nervous or anxious than usual. Suddenly the world just doesn’t seem the same as it did before the event. Instead of feeling secure, it feels unsafe and confusing. There are lots of ways that people—both kids and adults—show they are worried. They can become more watchful and jumpy, as if they expect new dangers around every corner. They can become more irritable and demanding. They can have new difficulties with sleep or eating and have more complaints about aches and pains in their bodies even when they do not have an illness or injury.

Sometimes children, especially younger children, become clingier with their caregivers. They may refuse or complain about participating in activities or going places, even activities they used to enjoy. Children may also suddenly develop specific fears about things that are part of their daily lives and have never bothered them before.

CHILDREN’S BEHAVIOR AND MOOD MAY CHANGE IN A VARIETY OF WAYS.
KIDS MAY SEEM:
- Withdrawn, less active
- Less interested in their usual activities – friendships, play, etc.
- Sad or overly sensitive
- Angry, irritable and ready for a fight
- Nervous, jumpy and frightened
- Preoccupied with memories of the upsetting event and with things that remind them of the event

CHILDREN MAY DO EVERYDAY THINGS DIFFERENTLY THAN THEY USUALLY DO. KIDS MIGHT HAVE:
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Eating problems—eating too little or too much, becoming picky
- Bedwetting or accidents, when they are already potty trained
- Struggles over bathing/brushing teeth
- Tantrums and more aggressive behavior
- Fear of certain things and activities
- Clinging and demanding behavior with parents and caregivers
- New aches and pains (Headaches, Stomach aches, etc.)
Sometimes, when children have had an overwhelming experience, they have inaccurate or distorted ideas about what happened and why. They may think they caused the event, even when there is no way that they were responsible. They may think that because the event happened once, it will happen again, even when they are now safe. These are the child’s way of trying to make sense of a scary or disturbing event, but often these thoughts can lead the child to feel worse. It is important for parents and other adults to pay attention to how children are doing after an upsetting event so that they can help them understand the truth and deal with the new thoughts, feelings and behaviors that are getting in the way.

Parents, too, often feel overwhelmed and worried by the same events that are affecting their children. Parents and other caregivers may also feel exhausted and irritated by their children’s difficult behavior.

In addition to more specific suggestions that you will discuss with the clinician, there are a few guidelines to help you best support your child.

**REMEMBER:**

**BE AWARE OF HOW YOU ARE FEELING**
Before you try to help your child with their upset thoughts, feelings and behaviors, make sure that you are feeling calm, patient and not easily frustrated. Take time for yourself and turn to trusted adults to talk about the things that are most troubling to you before you try to take care of your distressed child.

**REMINDD CHILD OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THEIR BEHAVIOR AND FEELINGS**
Which are brought up by the event, as discussed in meetings with clinician.

**MAINTAIN ROUTINES**
Keep routines that existed before the traumatic events as a way of supporting order and predictability in your child’s world.