



**Kitchener-Waterloo
Sexual Assault Support Centre**

151 Frederick St, Suite 201,
Kitchener, Ontario, N2H 2M2

24 Hour Crisis & Support Line (519) 741-8633

Business Line (519) 571-0121
Fax Line (519) 571-0522
TTY/TDD (519) 571-0864
Website www.kwsasc.org

Ways to Help Children who have been Exposed to Abuse

Age: 0 to 2 ½	
General Trauma Reactions	Support to Offer
Disruption of normal sleeping, eating, toileting patterns	Avoid unnecessary disruptions
“Startle” or “Freezing” reactions; Fussiness, Neediness	Maintain a calm atmosphere Providing additional soothing activities.
Loss of acquired skills (speech, motor) Developmental delays	Expect temporary “regression” Don’t panic
Separation fears and clingy or alternately, withdrawn and lacking response	Provide security and reassurance; give names to feelings; be patient; provide “play props” allow for nonverbal expressions.
Age 2 ½ to 6 years	
Retelling of the event	Listen and tolerate this
Mood and personality changes	Respect fears; make allowances
Anxiety, Fearfulness, Withdrawal, quieting Separation anxiety	Protect from re-exposure to frightening situations including: Scary TV programs, movies, stories, reminders of trauma Avoid nonessential separations.
Traumatic play Magical explanations to fill in gaps Unclear understanding of death and causes of “bad” behavior.	Help child name feelings with brief conversations. Provide simple, accurate statements to assist with realistic perceptions of their experiences.
Aggression and/or destruction of property.	Redirect, consequence lightly, maintains household rules, understand where this is coming from.
Regression of skills and/or behavior (e.g. bedwetting)	Expect and understand, remember this is likely temporary.
Sleep disturbances including: Nightmares, sleepwalking, fearful to go to sleep.	Provide night-time comforts (night lights, stuffed animals, physical comforting)
Insecurity	Maintain household and family routines that comfort the child Reassure the child.
Age: 6 to 11	
Repeated retelling of traumatic event	Listen and tolerate; be aware of your own reactions to the child’s trauma; challenge interpretations that involve self-blame and/or magical thinking.



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	Gently help child develop a realistic understanding of the event.
Obvious anxiety and fearfulness	Respect, give time for coping Identify triggers
Specific fears of recurrence Re-enactment of traumatic event	Monitor play and set limits on scary or hurtful play
Intrusive unwanted visual images of the event(s) that results in anxiety. Inability to concentrate, “spacey”, mood or personality changes	Encourage child to talk about confusing feelings, worries, daydreams, and disruptions in concentration. Listen carefully; convey these are normal reactions to very scary events.
Regression e.g. toileting accidents	Reassure feelings of fear and behaviors are normal and that the child will feel more like him/herself with time.
Bullying Destruction of Property Poor School Achievement	Maintain contact with school officials, express concerns as they arise; provide light consequences
Excesses of aggression, destruction of property and/or limit testing.	Introduce consequences, provide alternatives for anger management
Withdrawal and quieting, loss of interest in previously pleasurable activities.	Inquire and express caring; attempt to draw them into activities; provide alternate opportunities for expression (drawing, writing, etc.)
Sleep disturbances	Let child try out new ideas including extra reading time, radio on, listening to a tape, etc.
Increased need for control	Maintain limits, provide structure Provide opportunities for the child to experience personal control and having choices in daily activities. Remain aware of your own reactions to the child’s behavior
May be vulnerable to anniversary reactions, occasional reminders, holidays and other events.	Provide reassurance that the feelings will diminish over time. Anticipate likely triggers
Disrespect for females; sex-roles Stereotyping	Provide alternate way of seeing things; model varied gender roles; consequence for disrespect (lightly)
Age: 11 to 18 years	
Trauma driven, acting out behavior; sexual acting out, recklessness, risk taking	Encourage talking, provide “safety planning” information



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behavior.	
Efforts to distance selves from feelings of fear, anger, shame, guilt, humiliation	Reassure person that related feelings are normal following trauma and that talking about them is helpful
Driven-ness, obsessive behavior and involvement with others or retreat from others to manage inner turmoil	Help the person to find activities that offer mastery, control, self-esteem building. Encourage pleasurable activities e.g. sports and creative pursuits.
Accident prone Self harm Suicidal ideation	Address, inquire, and limit set. Monitor coping Seek professional help.
Wish for revenge and action oriented response to trauma	Encourage healthy expressions of anger.
Disturbances to usual eating and/or sleeping patterns	Expect regression; assist in development in self-care strategies.
Distress with intrusive memories and/or images of trauma	Access help as needed, listen, help person develop a sense of perspective on the event(s)
Vulnerability to depression, pessimism, withdrawal	Support, monitor, encourage a reality based view of situations.
Personality changes; changes in quality of relationships	Provide opportunity to be with friends who are supportive.
Movement to “adulthood” –early marriage, pregnancy, dropping out of school, abandoning peer group for older friends	Encourage processing of feelings Encourage age-appropriate activities. Encourage delay of big decisions
Fear of growing up	Reassure feelings will diminish over time; instill hope, provide opportunities to make choices, to experience personal control
Decline in school achievement Truancy	Keep in contact with school officials Frank, but gentle discussions; look for intrinsic motivators
Criminal activities	Allow natural and logical consequences; suggest alternatives.
Substance Use	Educate, set limits, allow consequences, encourage alternate behavior
Running Away	Teach safety strategies; identify preferences; acknowledge their freedom to choose.