



Coping with Trauma:

How PARTNERS & CAREGIVERS *can* HELP

How can I support my loved one
experiencing psychological trauma?

What is psychological trauma?

A distressing, dangerous, or scary event that causes intense feelings of fear, horror, or helplessness may be described as a **traumatic event**. Immediately after a traumatic event, it is normal that one's body and mind will typically go through a period of adjustment.

Psychological trauma refers to the adverse impact a traumatic event can have on your loved one's emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing. It is a **subjective** experience, in that the same traumatic event can cause different reactions in different people. Some may show traumatic stress reactions immediately after the event, while others may display symptoms only weeks and months later.

Your loved one may find it hard to cope with their thoughts, feelings and bodily reactions after a traumatic event. You may also observe changes in their behaviours at home, school or work, or when interacting with others. To learn more information on traumatic stress symptoms, please ask for a copy of the **Psychological Trauma in Adults** brochure from your KKH practitioner.

Six Things You Can Do To Support Your Loved One:

1. Learn more about psychological trauma.

As traumatic stress reactions can sometimes be challenging to manage, learning more about your loved one's symptoms can increase empathy and compassion towards them, and discover together ways of coping with these reactions.

2. Identify trauma reminders.

You may start to observe that some situations, people, places, or things can lead to quick changes in your loved one's mood or behaviours. These are known as **trauma reminders**, or **trauma triggers**. As you better understand their trauma reminders, you can prepare your loved one to better cope with their reactions to these reminders (refer to point '3').



3. Support them in coping with distress.



There are two effective strategies commonly used to manage the immediate effects of traumatic stress symptoms in response to trauma triggers. You may wish to ensure that your loved one is in a quieter place before asking them to do:

- **Deep breathing.** Practise deep breathing by breathing in and out deeply and slowly for at least 20 counts, preferably through the diaphragm, and/or
- **Grounding.** Connect with their five senses using the 5-4-3-2-1 method. Identifying 5 things we can see, 4 things we can feel (texture), 3 things we can hear, 2 things we can smell, and 1 thing we can taste in the current environment we are in.

If your loved one is seeing a therapist, you may find out from the therapist about other strategies that may be helpful. This can show your loved one that you are willing to understand and support them in their recovery process.

4. Allow for “down days”.

It may help to accept that there will likely be ‘down days’, when your loved one may feel more emotionally sensitive, irritable, or be triggered by unexpected trauma reminders. It may also help both your loved one and yourself if you discuss with them beforehand on how they would like to be supported during such days.

5. Notice how you are affected.

It is important to be mindful of how your loved one’s reactions to trauma reminders can affect your own feelings and behaviours. You can discuss with them some ways in which you can still feel safe while supporting them with their trauma reactions. As their support figure, you can continue to understand and acknowledge your loved ones’ experiences without accepting acts of verbal threats, aggression, or violence, or feeling responsible for their behaviours. Setting clear boundaries like this allows you to provide them with physical and emotional support sustainably.

6. Practise self-care.

Where possible, schedule periods of rest, physical activity, or personal time for yourself in your day. Listening to your own needs and reaching out to those you trust can also ensure that you receive the support you need.





Can your loved ones recover from psychological trauma?

As a partner or caregiver, your support can often be a source of strength for your loved ones healing from psychological trauma. You can contribute to your loved one's recovery by providing consistent support using the mentioned strategies.

Recovering from psychological trauma will take time, and the length of recovery varies across individuals. Most people can naturally recover when their environment or circumstances stabilise, when they practise coping strategies, and receive social support from others. Some may benefit from working with trained professionals who can assist them in their recovery.

When and where can your loved ones seek professional support from?

If your loved one is still experiencing traumatic stress symptoms more than **one month** after the traumatic event, consider speaking with a polyclinic doctor or general practitioner (GP) for a referral to a psychiatrist and/or psychologist in restructured hospitals. You may also consider seeking out private psychiatrists or psychologists, without needing a referral.

If your loved one is currently seeing a psychiatrist or medical doctor at KKH, they can refer you to the **KKH Psychosocial Trauma Support Service (PTSS)**. PTSS consists of a team of clinical psychologists who specialises in providing psychological trauma assessment and interventions for women and children. These forms of support can help them to better cope with the after-effects of traumatic experiences.

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