

General Effects: Children may develop PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) in the aftermath of a traumatic event. Such events could include abuse, neglect, violence, disasters, or death. Symptoms of PTSD can vary by child depending on their age, the event, and their recovery. Symptoms can last from several months to many years. Some things may act as triggers and can make certain symptoms more prevalent. A child may exhibit symptoms of PTSD without a formal diagnosis.

Symptoms may include:

- Flashbacks
- Problems remembering the traumatic event
- Repetition in play of the event
- Impulsive behavior
- Aggression
- Fear or worry
- Sleep problems
- Avoidance of certain people or places
- Hypervigilance
- Low self-worth
- Emotional numbness
- Sadness /Loneliness
- Inability to trust others
- Highly affectionate
- Self-harm
- Problems with peer relationships
- Poor school performance
- Physical symptoms
- Difficulty concentrating
- Experience confusion or repetition as a result of not fully understanding why they feel the way they do

Advice for Mentors:

Allow your Little to feel safe in their environment

- Take a moment to orient you and your Little so you feel comfortable with your surroundings.
- Giving your Little a set plan for the outing may help them prepare for the day. By providing your Little with such information, it will give them a greater sense of security. Give your Little advance warning of any changes and be sure they understand what to expect.
- Help your Little build self-confidence through encouragement of independence. Have your Little make decisions on outings, which can provide a sense of power and control over one's life and build competence.
- Provide your Little with advanced notice on cancellations or date changes if needed. Apologize for changes and emphasize that you WANT to spend time together. Prioritize rescheduling. Understand that change may be difficult for a Little to cope with, and that they may get upset about it.

Show support

- Whether or not your Little discusses the traumatic event with you, it is important to offer your support. Spending quality time with your Little will create a trusting relationship, which will provide them with security and confidence.
- While you may be aware of the traumatic event, it is not your responsibility to fix it. If a Little does bring it up, show them that you care by listening and being patient. In this case, focus on positives. For example, remind your Little that "they are safe now" or ask him questions regarding family and friends who they can trust.
- Never feel obligated to provide answers if a Little brings up a past event. Show appreciation for your Little's openness, but be sure to defer to a guardian's wishes on how to proceed. Do not feel that a Little has to talk about the event with you or that it is a necessary, positive sign of growth in the relationship. It can be distressing for a Little to discuss the event and it should only occur if the Little brings it up and feels comfortable. You are a friend and support for your Little, not a therapist.

Establish appropriate boundaries¹

- If your Little is overly affectionate, develop an appropriate way to express your friendship, such as a special handshake. Model appropriate boundaries both with your Little and also with others you meet.

¹ Please refer to the "Match Safety Guidelines for Bigs" that was handed out with your new match packet.