**How to Help Your Child Deal With a Minor Traumatic Incident?**

 **5 things you can do as a parent**

Depending on the developmental level of your child, the impact of life events like a small fender bender, or grandpa going to the hospital can last for a long time.

You are your child’s first responder. They are going to turn to you for help first because they trust you and know that you can help. It can be confusing for you because it is difficult to know how much information you can give to your child safely. You also might worry about wellness of your child. Here are some useful tips-

**Use open ended questions**

Open ended questions provide opportunity to gain more information. You can ask-

* How did it feel?
* What did you want to do?
* Can you tell me more?

**Validate and acknowledge your child’s feelings and thoughts in a non-judgmental way**

You can say something like -

* Yes, it was scary
* You wanted to help
* You thought grandpa is going to die when he went to the hospital
* You feel sad that you can’t play with sister now
* You are worried that we will get into an accident again

**Ask your child to draw the incident**

* When your child starts talking about the incident give them crayons/markers and ask them to draw it the way they remember it.
* Make non-judgmental comments about the drawing such as; I see a person on the ground, you drew yourself in the corner

**Hold your child**

Nothing tells your child they are safe and protected other than a hug.

* Hold them close to you
* Sit them on your lap and reassure them that you are there for them.
* If they are having trouble sleeping, hold their hand while they are holding a stuffed toy/blankie, sing a lullaby, read a book.

**Reassure them that things are OK**

Children feel better when they see that the situation is better now.

* Keep their routine as normal as possible
* Use technology. Do face time with grandpa to reassure your child that he is fine.
* Avoid giving them too much information- give only age appropriate information
* Distract with a playdate, movie, visit to a zoo, playing a board game.

**When to seek professional help**

Consult a professional; pediatrician or counselor if you notice the following symptoms lasting for more than one month on a consistent basis. Look for the following signs of distress in your child-

* Increased frequency of feelings like sadness, fear, confusion, guilt
* Unusual mood swings
* Difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep, night terrors, nightmares
* Avoidance of activities, people or places
* Social withdrawal
* Sudden changes in behavior at home or at school- crying spells, anger outbursts, difficulty focusing
* Exaggerated, startle response
* Headaches or stomach aches

The list of symptoms is not exhaustive. One or more of the above symptoms might be present immediately after the event. Some symptoms may be delayed; may show up for up to 6 months after the incident. Remember, when in doubt, always consult with a professional.

Note - This is applicable to children 0-6 year old. Some of the techniques can be applied to older children.

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