

Young Children (ages 2 to 5)

Parenting a traumatized child can be a difficult task. Young children often can't tell us how they feel. One way they cope with trauma is through behaviors. Learning to see the signs of trauma and respond to them in a positive way helps children process their feelings in a safe way.

Symptom	Explanation	Common Signs
<p><u>Regression</u></p>	<p>Trauma can make children feel powerless. Children may regress or take comfort in more “baby-like” behaviors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thumb sucking • Asking for a bottle • Bed-wetting • Not interested in playing or usual activities 
<p><u>PTSD, Fear, Anxiety</u></p> 	<p>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may develop when reactions to being unsafe or hurt continue even when the traumatic event is over.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy startling, inconsolable crying, incessant whining • Headaches, stomach aches, in the absence of an illness • Being scared of going to bed, darkness, loud noises, certain places • Nightmares
<p><u>Clinginess</u></p> 	<p>When children cannot predict or control traumatic events or people in their world they may feel unsafe or insecure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being very “clingy” or “attached” to you, a stuffed toy, a baby blanket or another “lovie” • Showing strong “separation anxiety”
<p><u>Temper Tantrums</u></p> 	<p>Traumatized children often have difficulty controlling their emotions and act impulsively. They may have more intense emotional reactions or suddenly fall apart, emotionally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a sudden, intense tantrum in reaction to a minor frustration • Destroy toys they are frustrated with; suddenly aggressive with other children • Severe irritability or outbursts of anger
<p><u>Sexualized Behaviors</u></p>	<p>For all children, sexual behaviors may arise from self-soothing or impulsivity. When a child has experienced sexual abuse, they may re-enact it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touching own or others’ private parts • Showing private parts • Talking about sex 
<p><u>Avoidance</u></p> 	<p>Children who have been hurt in the past may try to avoid being hurt again by distancing themselves from others, becoming self-reliant or overly pleasing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will not reach out for comfort if hurt or scared, does not show emotions • Refuse to be held, hugged or comforted • Will not engage in “fun” activities or with others; “blank stare”
<p><u>“Off” Play</u></p> 	<p>Children may engage in repetitive or reckless play, or play out a traumatic event, as a way to manage their anxiety and control their emotions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throwing or banging toys together • Building a tower and repeatedly knocking it over • Making toys behave aggressively

