

Tips for Supporting Loved Ones with Trauma

Here are some ideas for those of you who love and care about someone who has experienced trauma. Be aware that everyone grieves and copes with trauma in different ways and over varying lengths of time. The way that your loved one copes may be very different from yours. These suggestions may help you support someone you love:

You do not need the perfect words. Your steady, compassionate presence matters. Trauma affects people in different ways, and healing is not linear. Some people want to talk; others need quiet, space, distraction, or practical help.

Listen more than you talk

- Give your loved one space to share, but do not pressure them to talk about what happened. Let them decide what, when, and how much to share.
- Helpful phrases: "I'm here with you." "You don't have to talk unless you want to." "I believe you." "What would feel supportive right now?"

Avoid judgment or pressure

- Trauma survivors may already feel guilt, shame, fear, anger, confusion, or numbness. Try not to tell them how they should feel or what they should do.
- Avoid: "At least it wasn't worse," "Everything happens for a reason," "You need to move on," or "You should be over this by now."

Normalize without minimizing

- Trouble sleeping, appetite changes, fatigue, irritability, sadness, fear, anger, numbness, difficulty concentrating, isolation, and feeling on edge can all be common reactions after trauma.
- Try: "This is a normal response to something overwhelming." "Your body and mind are trying to protect you."

Offer specific, practical help

- Instead of "Let me know if you need anything," offer simple choices.
- Examples: "I can drop off dinner this week." "I can help with errands or childcare." "I can sit with you during an appointment." "I can check in by text, and you don't have to respond."

Respect privacy and choice

- Trauma can involve a loss of control. Give your loved one as much choice as possible. Do not share their story unless they have clearly given permission.
- Ask: "What are you comfortable with me sharing, if anything?" "Who feels safe for you right now?"



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Keep showing up

- Some people withdraw because they feel overwhelmed, exhausted, or worried about burdening others. Keep reaching out gently without demanding a response.
- Try: "No need to reply. Just wanted you to know I'm thinking of you." "I'm here today, and I'll still be here next week."

Encourage support when needed

- Counseling or trauma-informed support can help, especially with flashbacks, nightmares, panic, intense distress, increased substance use, thoughts of self-harm, or difficulty functioning.
- Say: "You don't have to go through this alone." "I can help you find support or sit with you while you make the call."

Take care of yourself too

- Supporting someone after trauma can be heavy. Stay connected to your own support system, take breaks, and seek support for yourself when needed.
- You do not have to fix their pain. Listening, believing, respecting choices, and continuing to show up can be deeply healing.

Immediate safety concern: Call 911 emergency services or call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

