

Sleep Difficulties

Why does it happen?

A scary event can make things hard for your child. Children who have trouble with sleep after trauma could be experiencing:

Hypervigilance

When faced with threat, it's normal to be on "high alert." But when the threat is gone, hypervigilance makes it very hard to relax.

Fear conditioning/trauma trigger

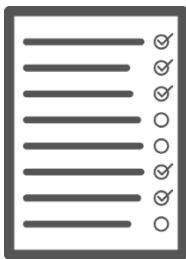
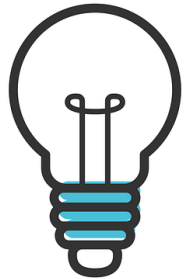
Children may associate their trauma with nighttime fear to darkness, causing sleep difficulties.

Nightmares

Scary events can show up in your child's dreams as a nightmare. Fear of the nightmare and of having more nightmares can make it difficult to fall asleep.

What can I do?

Understand: Often, thinking about not being able to fall asleep or "getting in trouble" for not being asleep can cause stress! Talk to your child and let them know that it's normal to have a hard time falling asleep after something scary has happened. Tell your child that you understand their fear before reassuring them that their fear is separate from reality. Remember to be patient and have realistic expectations for how long it may take a child to overcome sleep challenges.



Routine: Having a routine at bedtime every night can take away some of the anxiety your child is feeling. This means having the same bed time, even on weekends. For younger kids, try reading a book together, singing a song or using a special handshake before turning the lights out. Older kids can try listening to music, journaling or reading *every* night.

Safety: A child may not be in physical danger but may not feel safe in their mind. Perceived threat and real threat feel the same to a child. Help your child feel safe by using a night light or a security object like a blanket. Say out loud that your child is safe. Show the child they are safe with hugs, high fives and sticky notes around the bed that say you are thinking about them. Older kids may need to see that the windows and house doors are locked. With younger kids you can check together to make sure there are no monsters in the closet before bed time. Sometimes, it'll take more than these tools to help a child with their sleep. Work with a doctor or counselor to help create goals and a plan to help your child.

