



# Helping your preschooler (3-5 years) Medical traumatic stress

It is common and normal for preschool aged children to experience medical traumatic stress. However, the way children understand their experience, communicate distress and respond over time depends on temperament, previous experiences, stage of development and support provided.

**Developmental considerations:** Preschoolers are developing their thinking skills, but can still show confusion, misunderstanding or magical thinking about their medical experience/s (e.g. 'needles are punishment for being bad,' 'I can make this illness go away with my superpowers'). Confused or inaccurate memories can increase fears about the event. Preschoolers still need support from their caregiver/s to help them understand what happened, identify thoughts and feelings, and to manage pain and distress. Preschoolers mostly show distress through behaviour, but can also communicate through talking, play and drawing.



## Six ways you can support your preschooler



**Connection:** Focus on ways to connect throughout the day by providing comfort, affection, fun and special time together.



**Targeted strategies:** Use relaxation techniques and coping strategies to manage big feelings, and encourage and reward brave and positive behaviours.



**Routine:** Follow predictable sleep, eating, play and education routines and have clear and consistent expectations for behaviour.



**Processing the event:** Talk, read and play games to help them understand and make meaning of their experience. Correct misunderstandings of facts.



**Identify emotions:** Notice signs of distress and name and validate feelings. Respond calmly with warmth and affection. Consider if challenging behaviors are signs of stress.



**Seek extra help:** If emotional distress continues and is affecting relationships, medical care and daily activities seek extra help.

Scan this QR code for more information and resources. You can also talk to your child's treating team, GP, paediatrician or child health nurse for further advice.



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Disclaimer: This information has been produced by healthcare professionals as a guideline only and is intended to support, not replace, discussion with your child's doctor or healthcare professionals. Information is updated regularly, so please check you are referring to the most recent version. Seek medical advice, as appropriate, for concerns regarding your child's health.



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