



CHILDHOOD TRAUMATIC SEPARATION: YOUTH INFORMATION SHEET

WHAT IS SEPARATION DISTRESS?

Separation distress describes the many different feelings and reactions you may naturally have after an unwanted separation from a family member, friend, or other person you are close to.

You may show a range of:

- EMOTIONS & REACTIONS:** Sometimes you can be sad and miss the person. Other times you can do your normal activities, like hanging out with friends.
- THOUGHTS:** You can remember positive things about the person, but also have thoughts that bother you, have trouble focusing or have other worries.
- BEHAVIORS:** Your behaviors may change. You may be less active, show irritation, not eat or sleep as well as before, or hang out less with friends, and stay by yourself more.

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There is no set amount of time for getting over the unexpected separation from someone close to you. Gradually, many of you will find ways to cope with your feelings and the changes in your life. It is natural and OK to still feel sad or miss a person even months or years later; especially if you are reminded of that person on certain special dates, events, activities, or places you went together.

WHO GETS CHILDHOOD TRAUMATIC SEPARATION?

Most of you who are separated from someone important, will be able to adjust and recover, but some may have more trouble adjusting to the separation and have a traumatic reaction. This can happen if the separation was sudden, unexpected or otherwise distressing, such as placement in foster care, military deployment, and parental deportation or incarceration. Separation from a parent, caregiver, or other important adult can be especially traumatic for youth due to the importance of that relationship.

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HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE TRAUMATIC SEPARATION?

If you have a traumatic reaction to a separation you may:

- Have upsetting thoughts, images, nightmares or memories about the scary way the separation occurred that come into your head.
- Have physical reactions such as headaches, and stomachaches, especially when reminded of the separation.
- Become jumpy or have trouble concentrating.
- Avoid feelings or withdraw. Act as if you are not upset about the separation or avoid reminders of the person, the way the separation occurred, places or things related to the person, or events that led to the separation.
- Remain in a bad mood or have unpleasant beliefs related to the traumatic separation such as being angry, feeling guilty, blaming yourself, distrusting others, believing the world is unsafe, or thinking that no one is consistent in your life.
- Express anger or blame others you see as responsible for the separation, such as yourself, the person you were separated from, and others.
- Feel more irritable, have trouble sleeping or concentrating, have grades drop.
- Become extra careful and have more fears about your safety and others, or additional separations.
- Do self-destructive or risky things, like abuse alcohol or drugs, feel like you want to hurt yourself.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FEEL BETTER?

There are many things you can do to cope with traumatic separation reactions:

- Express your feelings in creative ways with art making, writing, dancing.
- Do calming activities such as yoga or listening to music.
- Reach out to friends, family, or other supports to help you through.
- Check in with a mental health professional to see if you need more help.

WHAT IF I NEED MORE HELP?

Special therapy can help you pull things back together with friends, at school, and at home. You can learn what triggers your reactions as well as ways to take control of them.

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