

Dear Parents and Teachers,

The following materials are being shared with you as you continue to deal with the aftermath of the flood.

Many children and families have gone through times that would be labeled as traumatic. Sometimes trauma reactions are short term and disappear. Other times post traumatic stress disorder can occur. We do not want to overreact to trauma reactions however, we do not want to underreact either. Thus, we are providing some information on what post traumatic stress disorder is.

Also, we are providing information on resources available to all parents and children affected by the flood.

I hope you find this material worth reading.

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What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a debilitating condition that often follows a terrifying physical or emotional event that is beyond an expected life event- causing the person who survived the event to have persistent, frightening thoughts and memories, or flashbacks, of the ordeal. Persons with PTSD often feel chronically, emotionally numb. PTSD in children and adolescents can become a chronic disorder.

What causes post-traumatic stress disorder?

The event(s) that may trigger PTSD may be:

- something that occurred in the person's life
- something that occurred in the life of someone close to him/her
- something the person witnessed

A child's/adolescent's risk for developing PTSD is often affected by the child's or adolescent's proximity and relationship to the trauma, the severity of the trauma, the duration of the traumatic event, the recurrence of the traumatic event, the resiliency of the child, the coping skills of the child and the support resources available to the child from the family and community following the event(s).

Who is affected by post-traumatic stress disorder?

Traumatic experiences are not common in the lives of most children and adolescents. However, approximately 3,000,000 children each year are diagnosed with PTSD.

What are the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder?

The following are the most common symptoms of PTSD. However, each child or adolescent may experience PTSD in different manners, and may have some or all of the listed symptoms.

Children and adolescents with PTSD experience extreme emotional, mental and physical distress when exposed to situations that remind them of the traumatic event. Some may repeatedly experience the trauma in the form of nightmares and disturbing recollections during the day and may also experience any, or all, of the following:

- sleep disturbances
 - depression
 - being hypervigilant
 - being easily startled
 - loss of interest in things they used to enjoy; detachment; general lack of responsiveness; feeling numb
 - difficulty feeling affectionate toward others
 - irritability, more aggressive than before, or even violent
 - avoiding certain places or situations that bring back memories
 - flashbacks or intrusive images (flashbacks can come in the form of images, sounds, smells, or feelings; a person usually believes that the traumatic event is happening all over again)
 - losing touch with reality
- reenactment of an event for a period of seconds or hours or, very rarely, days
 - problems in school; difficulty concentrating
 - worry about dying at an early age
 - regressive behaviors; acting younger than their age (i.e., thumb sucking, bedwetting)
 - physical symptoms (i.e., headaches, stomach aches)

How is post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosed?

Not every child or adolescent who experiences a trauma develops PTSD. PTSD is diagnosed only if symptoms persist for more than one month and are adversely affecting the child's life and level of functioning. *In those who are diagnosed with PTSD, symptoms usually begin within three months following the trauma, but can also start months or years later.*

PTSD can occur at any age, *including childhood*, and may be accompanied by:

- depression
- anxiety
- substance abuse
- symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity

- obsessions

The length of the condition varies. Some people recover within six months, others have symptoms that last much longer.

A qualified mental health professional usually diagnoses PTSD in children or adolescents following a comprehensive psychological evaluation. Parents who note symptoms of PTSD in their child or adolescent can help by seeking an evaluation early. Early treatment can decrease future problems.

Treatment for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Specific treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder will be determined by your child's physician or mental health provider based on:

- your child's age, overall health, and medical history
- extent of your child's symptoms
- your child's tolerance for specific medications, procedures, or therapies
- expectations for the course of the disorder
- your opinion or preference

PTSD can be treated. Early detection and intervention is very important and can reduce the severity of symptoms, enhance the child's normal growth and development and improve the quality of life experienced by children or adolescents with PTSD.

Treatment recommendations may include psycho-social therapies or group therapy for the child or adolescent. Some children may also benefit from treatment with medications.

The child or adolescent's recovery from PTSD is highly variable and dependent on the child or adolescent's internal strengths, coping skills and resiliency (ability to "bounce back") as well as severity of the trauma, frequency of reexposure of traumatic events and comorbidity of other mental health disorders. Recovery is also influenced by the support available within the family environment. Parents play a vital supportive role in the treatment process.

Local Resources:

Mandy Gesme, IMHC (Cedar Valley Mental Health Center) is the Project Recovery Outreach Counselor. You can contact Mandy at 352-2064.

Mandy has given the school counselors materials we can give to you as parents. We also can go through them with your child at school if you wish. The materials we have are called "The Great

Storm and Flood Recovery” a children’s story and activity book. This activity book is for children and parents. It was created through the Children’s Flood Recovery Project and is the work of a group of mental health and medical professionals who volunteered to help kids and their families through the storms and floods.

There are helpful hints on emotional consequences of the flood, steps to take if symptoms are severe or persist, common stress reactions following a flood and helpful hints to recovery.

These include:

- Set a healthy example by taking care of yourself physically and emotionally.
- Maintain physical activity to reduce and prevent stress.
- Eat well. Limit fats, sugar, caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. This enhances recovery of stress.
- Manage time well. Avoid over extending yourself. However, try to maintain a regular schedule of things you normally attend.
- Talk it out. Reach out to friends or potential friends because relationships are tremendously important. Talk about feelings with a good listener who is supportive.
- Remember to breathe. People under stress may not breathe adequately in panic situations.
- Be assertive. Say what you feel and need. This prevents you from blaming others and becoming frustrated or disappointed.
- Take time to be alone. Do your favorite pleasurable activity or hobby to relax.
- Play. Have some fun.
- Forgive. People can’t remember or do everything they want when they are in crisis. Forgive yourself and others.
- Be open to change or obtaining assistance.
- Help others. Helping others is a good way to feel better and recover. However, don’t help others all the time to avoid dealing with your own feelings.

- Laugh. Laughter is a great stress reliever. A deeply felt laugh releases stress.

There is more to read in this packet. Call your school counselor or Mandy Gesme, LMHC and Cedar Valley Mental Health at 352-2064. We are here to help you.

Sincerely,

Kendall Fate, Counselor
Irving and Shellrock Schools

