

## Burns Team Contact Details

For more information about any of the services please contact a member of the Burns Team.

Burns Unit Tel: 0151 252 5400 Open 24 hours seven days a week	Occupational Therapy Dept Tel: 0151 252 5453 Open Monday-Friday 9.00 am-5.00 pm
Physiotherapy Dept Tel: 0151 252 5236 Open Monday-Friday 9.00 am-5.00 pm	Psychology Dept Tel: 0151 252 5586 Open Monday-Friday 9.00 am-5.00 pm

*This leaflet only gives general information. You must always discuss the individual treatment of your child with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your child's treatment.*

*This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.*

# Burns Unit

## Coping with frightening events or injuries

A booklet for teenagers and young people



## Traumatic Events and Reactions to Them

### What do we mean by a frightening or traumatic event?

In our everyday lives, any of us can have an experience that makes us feel very scared, worried, or upset.

A traumatic event can involve a threat to our safety, but any situation that is frightening, overwhelming, and beyond our control may be traumatic. Examples include: accidents, injuries, serious illness or medical procedures. A burn injury is one of the most common accidents in childhood. If you have experienced a serious burn resulting in a hospital admission then it is possible that you may have some emotional reactions as a result of the trauma.

### Why are traumatic events so shocking?

They can undermine our sense that life is fair and reasonably safe, and make us fear that the world is an unsafe place to be. Traumatic experiences can therefore make us question our safety.

### How do people react to frightening or traumatic events?

When we have experienced a traumatic event or injury, many people feel upset, angry, confused, scared, anxious, guilty, and sad. We might also experience:

### Flashbacks and nightmares

- This is when we find ourselves re-living the event over and over again, which can be very frightening. This can happen both as a 'flashback' during the day, and as nightmares during sleep
- They can be very realistic, so it feels as though we are living through the experience all over again. We see it in our mind, but may also experience the emotional and physical feelings of what happened.

### Avoidance and numbing

- Sometimes it can be too upsetting to remember what happened. We might try not to think about it, by avoiding places and people that remind us of the event. We might try to keep busy by losing ourselves in a hobby, working very hard, or spending time absorbed in other activities
- We may also try to cope by bottling our feelings up and trying to 'switch off' any feelings. We may do this by communicating less with other people, but this can be hard for others around us too

### Being 'on guard'

- This is sometimes called 'hypervigilance'. It means that we try to stay alert all of the time, as if we are looking out for danger. We might feel very anxious and find it hard to sleep.

Other people may notice that we are jumpy and irritable

### Other reactions and feelings may include:

- Physical complaints, e.g. aches and pains, headache, diarrhoea, irregular heartbeats
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- Changes in eating habits
- Feelings of panic and fear

### Are these reactions normal?

Yes. Almost everyone experiences some of these reactions for a month or so after a traumatic event. They can keep us going and help us to understand what happened. Over a few weeks, most people slowly come to terms with the event and these symptoms start to disappear.

## Things that can help

### Coping with flashbacks:

Flashbacks are a common experience following a traumatic event. They can be upsetting, but some of the following suggestions may help:

- Remind yourself that you are having a flashback and that this is normal after a traumatic experience

- Remind yourself that the event was in the past, and you are not in danger now: "that was then, and this is now"

- Try some ways of 'grounding' yourself, where possible:

- Look around the room: think of 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, and 2 things you can smell.

- Stamp your feet or clap your hands to remind yourself of where you are.

- Let someone know you are having a flashback, so they can help if you want them to. They could hold you, talk to you, or help you to remember that you are safe

- Notice the sensations in your body; the boundary of your skin, your clothes; the chair, bed, or floor supporting you. Remind yourself of where you are right now

### Relaxed Breathing

Put one hand on your chest and one on your stomach. To help you relax, breathe deeply so that the hand on your stomach gets pushed up and down.





## Helpful Resources

You might find the following links and resources helpful:

### Young Minds



<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/ptsd/>

### Mindfulness Apps



Headspace or Breathe can be downloaded from the app store and Google Play store. Some people find them really useful to help relax.

## Further Support

When reactions to your burn injury - such as flashbacks or avoiding things - continue for a long time or get in the way of everyday life, it can sometimes be helpful to speak to a

### Clinical Psychologist.

Clinical Psychologists are trained in understanding how people develop, think, feel and behave. We use this knowledge to help children and their families cope with any difficulties. If you think you would find speaking to one of the Burns Clinical Psychologists helpful, your doctor or nurses can make a referral to us here in Psychological Services.

We can then think together about the most helpful approach to support you, which may include linking you in with services closer to home.

## Support Agencies

Changing Faces  
Tel: 0171 742 3206 | [www.changingfaces.co.uk](http://www.changingfaces.co.uk)

Children's Burns Trust  
Tel: 020 7881 0902 | [www.cbtrust.org.uk](http://www.cbtrust.org.uk)

Dan's Fund for Burns  
Tel: 020 7262 4039 | [www.dansfundforburns.org](http://www.dansfundforburns.org)