

Contact Details

If you would like to discuss any difficulties or enquire about further support with the Burns Clinical Psychologists you can contact us on the telephone number below:

Psychological Services
Tel: 0151 252 5586
(9am till 5pm Monday–Friday)

Useful Information

You may find the following links helpful:

www.supportingchildrenwithburns.co.uk
www.pacey.org.uk ('Spotlight on' tab –supporting children through trauma)
www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/ptsd/
www.ptsduk.org
www.davidtrickey.com/resources

Burns Unit

Emotional and behavioural responses following a burn injury

Information for parents and carers



What is a traumatic event?

Children and young people sometimes witness, or are involved in events that they find very scary. A traumatic event can involve threat to safety, but any situation that is frightening, overwhelming, and beyond a child's control may be traumatic.

Facts of the event don't define whether it was traumatic, rather it is the emotional response. Examples include being in an accident, being injured, serious illness, or undergoing some medical procedures.

Burn injuries are one of the most common accidents experienced in childhood. If your child has experienced a serious burn resulting in a hospital admission then it is possible that your child may develop some emotional reactions as a result of the trauma.

What to expect / common reactions

It is common for children to be upset, angry, confused, anxious, and scared after a traumatic event. As children try to understand what happened, a number of different reactions are common, including:

- Nightmares
- Memories or pictures of the event popping into their mind
- Getting angry, upset or anxious more easily

- Being jumpy and on the lookout for danger
- Not being able to concentrate
- Not being able to sleep
- Changes in eating habits
- Physical complaints, e.g. stomach ache or headache
- Temporary difficulties, e.g. feeding or toileting
- New problems at school

Nearly all children will show some of these reactions for a month or so after a traumatic event. Parents can similarly experience post-traumatic stress responses.

Over a few weeks, most children will start to come to terms with what happened, and these reactions will start to improve.

What can I do to help?

Let your child know that they are safe – this could be by telling them, just giving them a hug or stroking their arm.

Be patient and understanding – children's reactions can include crying, getting angry, being more clingy, and not wanting to sleep. Remember that these feelings and behaviours are common and are usually temporary.

Help your child understand what happened or is happening – use a simple but honest explanation of the main facts. This can correct any misunderstandings; for example some children might think that what happened was their fault. If your child needs to have a medical procedure, be honest that it may hurt but explain what the purpose is.

Allow children to talk about their feelings/worries if they want to – listen to your child and help them to talk about their feelings, but do not force them to. Let them know that feeling sad, upset or angry is normal, and that it is okay to be scared or to cry.

Younger children may be better at expressing their feelings through drawing, play, or storytelling.

Get back to everyday routines – as much as any pain/injury allows, help your child to get enough sleep, eat regularly, and get back to doing things they enjoy.

Take care of yourself – having a child involved in a traumatic event such as an accident or serious illness can be extremely difficult for parents, often resulting in feelings of guilt, frustration, sadness, helplessness, or worry.

As well as your child's symptoms, it is common for parents to experience post-traumatic stress responses too, so it is helpful to talk about your worries with others. Don't be afraid to ask friends, family or staff for help.

Who can I speak to while my child is in hospital?

If you or your child would like to meet with one of the Burns Clinical Psychologists while your child is in hospital, you can be referred by a nurse or doctor on the ward.

What if my child's reactions continue for a long period of time?

For some children, they may find it difficult to come to terms with what has happened and post-traumatic stress reactions may continue for longer periods of time or start to interfere with everyday life. If your child continues to be reviewed at Alder Hey, their Burns Consultant can make a referral to us here in Psychological Services for further assessment. We can think together about the most helpful approach to support your child, which may also include linking you in with services more local to home.

How do I access further support for myself?

As parents, if you continue to experience ongoing post-traumatic stress difficulties, it may also be helpful to meet to discuss your own ongoing support needs as well.

