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Common Parent Reactions to Child Trauma

Self-Blame and Guilt:

Often parents will blame themselves for the child's trauma. Parents may also feel guilt about what the child has experienced.

Blaming the Child:

Even well-intentioned parents can sometimes blame the child for the trauma. This can include not believing the child's trauma occurred.

Being Overly Protective:

When your child experiences trauma it is natural to worry about them and want to protect them. Sometimes parents protect too much by not allowing the child to do things or by limiting their activities.

Being Overly Permissive:

Another natural instinct after trauma is to indulge your child or give in to their wishes more than is healthy for them. Parents don't want their child to suffer more, so they don't set limits or enforce rules.

Becoming Overwhelmed:

When your child experiences trauma you may feel anger, helplessness, sadness, or intense worry. You may think about seeking revenge. But sometimes parents have difficulty feeling anything. Strong emotions and a lack of emotions are both typical reactions.

Feeling Worried That Your Child Won't Recover:

Parents often worry that their child is "scarred for life" or "permanently damaged."

Having your own PTSD Symptoms:

Parents can have PTSD too. You may have experienced the same trauma as your child, or a different trauma – in your childhood or adulthood. These experiences might contribute to the reactions you're having.

Secondary Adversities:

"Secondary adversities" is a term that describes different kinds of changes and stressors that can occur after trauma. The following are some secondary adversities:

- Involvement in the legal system.
- Involvement in the child protection system.
- Change in income,
- Change of residence.
- Loss of support from family, friends, and/or the community.
- Appointments with doctors, therapists, and/or social workers.
- Attending court hearings.
- Separation from family members.
- Loss of privacy (i.e. professionals asking personal questions).
- Loss of days at work and/or loss of employment.