



Institutul pentru Studiul
și Tratamentul Traumei

At peace with yourself and with your child during troubled times



Monica Lespezanu
psychologist, trauma psychotherapist

March 2022

**As a parent, what's
important to know?**

- Both children and adolescents live and experience what their parents or caretakers go through, BUT they have their OWN feelings, thoughts, behaviors regarding the world around them;
- The younger they are, the stronger the symbiosis and dependance on their parents are;
- The parents' presence and connection are vital for the physical and psychological well-being of children and adolescents;
- The child feels soothed once you, as a parent, secure yourself and calm down!





- Both children's and teenagers' personal strength is determined by many resources and capacities that manifest differently accordingly to their age
- We need to live in the present! Do not show excessive protection and do not expose yourself more than it is required



- Children and adolescents need social presence, love, protection, support and guidance - make sure you are there for them and get sufficiently involved!
- Children and adolescents need to be vital and full of energy, they need to play, to communicate, to learn, to move around, to relax, to feel important and useful at what they can do best - make sure you can provide all of the above!
- Children and adolescents need to have control over their lives - over their bodies, space and personal objects, their activities, emotions, thoughts and behaviors.



**What is natural for your
child/adolescent to feel?**



- The feeling that something bad is happening;
- The vulnerability of being exposed to dangers;
- Feelings of unsafety;
- Manifested fear, visible or not;



- Worries about loved ones, especially parents, significant caretakers, pets; older children also show concern for their own lives and well-being;
- Fear and emotional pain, expressed differently according to their age, predominantly visible in physiological reactions in the case of children and in behavior in the case of teenagers;
- Ruminations, questions, concerns regarding their personal and their family's future;



- Agitation, hyperactivity (“tug-of-war” games, refusal, opposition, activities that are too numerous and disorganized), detached behavior, disconnection from the outside world, self-orientation (to their bodies, rooms, activities and friends, tendencies to shut down and show “freezing” behavior).



**What can help your child
or teenager and what can
make things easier for
them?**

- ✓ Recognition and acceptance of their emotional experiences and manifested behaviors
- ✓ Acknowledgment of their concern over an uncertain reality
- ✓ Their capacity to maintain control in accordance with their age and abilities
- ✓ Carrying on with their personal activities and rituals related to school, preferences, friends (in accordance with their age, means and resources)

Be Resilient



- ✓ The parent's presence and emotional connection, being together with the child, standing by them when they express themselves and accepting them;
- ✓ Admitting when something bad has happened, recognizing and naming the peril;
- ✓ Limited mass-media exposure of infants; guiding older children to credible sources that can be checked;

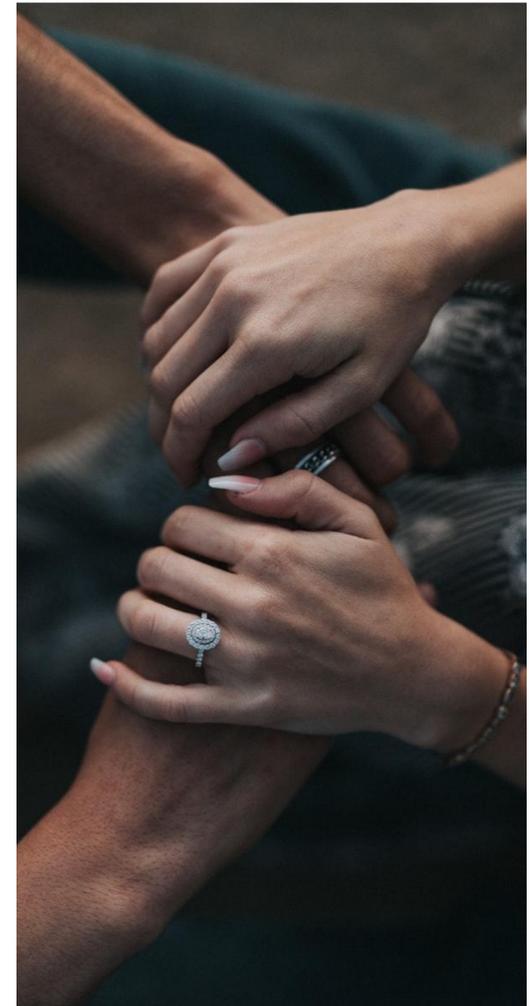
Keep Control



- ✓ Maintaining normal lifestyles, routines and school-related activities;
- ✓ Engaging in pleasant family activities, discussions, games, leisure time, sports and other social activities;
- ✓ Spending time together, increased physical contact, older children feel the need to communicate while younger ones need to be engaged in games that they devise on their own; generating good and safe experiences, optimism, self trust and family trust, when need be;
- ✓ Maintaining social contacts and the presence of significant people (friends, colleagues, neighbours), fostering children's friendships;



- ✓ Reducing and putting an end to (self)aggressive behavior - stop things such as “the death of my enemy”, reduce teenage “impetuous eagerness”;
- ✓ Offering support and aid to those in need; children are more compassionate, they resonate more with other people than adults do;
- ✓ Encouraging empathy, cooperation and helpfulness; young ones can achieve that by playing together, while older children can get involved as much as possible (making drawings, new objects, donations, offering personal belongings or resorting to creative means such as: written material, speeches, letters, movies, video clips, humanitarian initiatives)



- Accepting children's and adolescents' contingency plans for possible wars and modulating them in accordance with their capacities; young ones can help creating miscellaneous items, older ones can be productive through community involvement;
- Discussing day-to-day situations, quotidian things; laughing and making jokes, planning upcoming days and weeks;
- Continuing to plan for the future and for moments and activities related to family life;
- Maintaining trust, hope and faith in the progress of good things.



How can one secure children and adolescents emotionally?

It is natural and healthy for children and adolescents to allow themselves to feel!

- Identify and encourage the expression of emotions. Do this together with younger children; older ones should be encouraged to do it by themselves or with other people as well;
- Normalize emotional experiences and accept them: “I believe you...that’s right... you are afraid... you feel restless”;



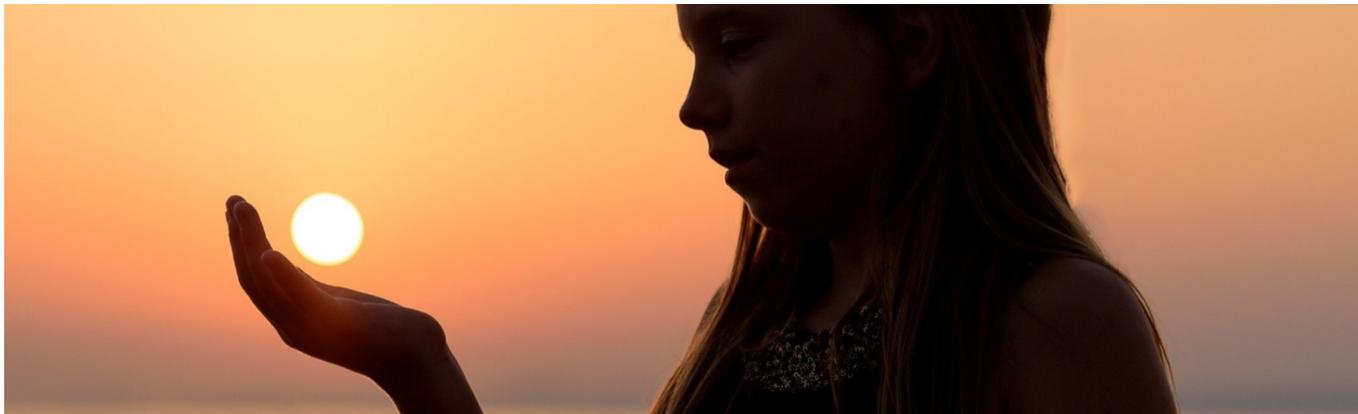
- Children and teenagers can activate memories and emotional experiences associated with past dangerous situations (accidents, hospitalizations, separations, bullying); help them to differentiate the past from the present “We are at peace now! Right now we are not in danger! Focus on the present!”;
- Keep the connection with the present without minimizing or ignoring the moments in which fear and pain were experienced “You can be happy and sad at the same time”;
- Stimulate games, storytelling, discussions and activities in which they can let go of their feelings;
- Maintain trust and hope “We do not know what the future holds, let’s play, let’s talk...”.



How can one help children and teenagers to manage their thoughts?

Children and teenagers have positive thoughts and cognitions!

- Identify positive language, good thoughts and things that happen to them “It’s so good that you are happy now, that you did..., that you can...that you have...”;
- Identify, manage and limit negative thoughts “Of course thoughts like these come to mind, but let’s put them aside and...”;



- Identify and generate constructive messages and behaviors “It’s good that we are together and...”, “It’s important that we are here now and we’re doing this...”;
- Simultaneously identify (self)aggressive behavior and verbalize their experiences while trying to reduce or stop them “I see that you are harming yourself... you are important to me, I cannot let this happen to you...”;
- Keep good daily and weekly routines;
- Make future plans together!



What protects children and teenagers?

Internally:

- Vitality, energy and personal resources;
- Good health and well-being;
- A balanced way of functioning;
- Basic needs met.



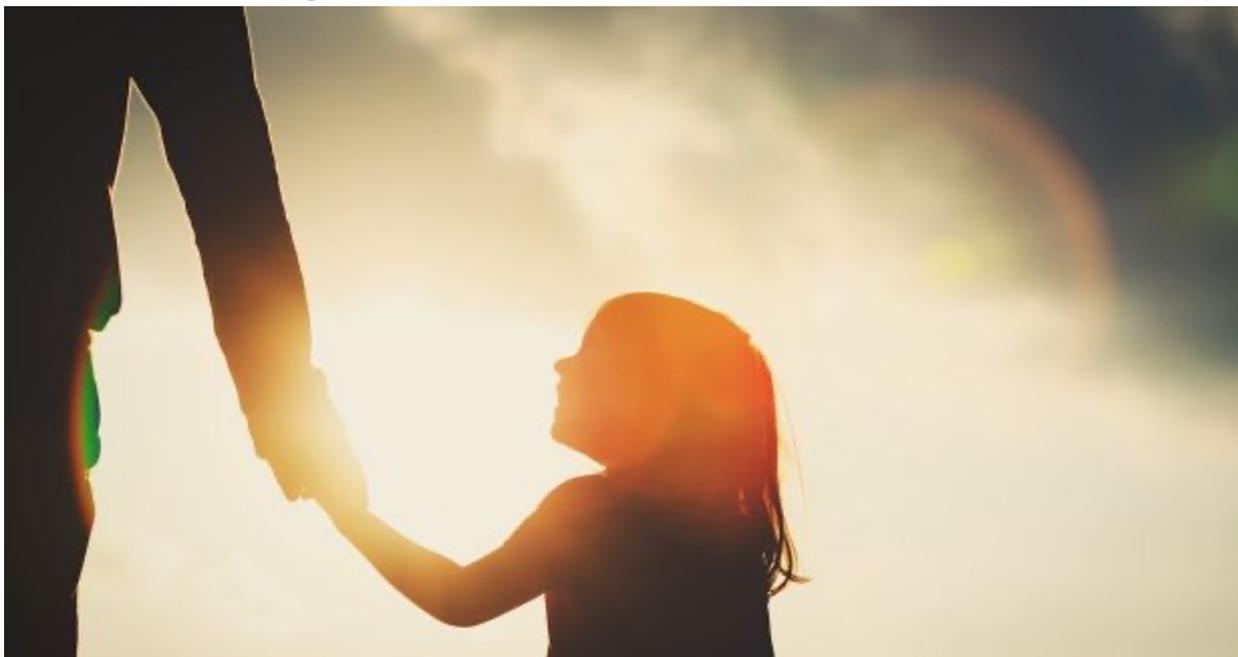
What protects children and teenagers?

Externally:

- A good, warm, containing and secure relationship with the parent;
- The parent's balanced state of mind; the parent's ability to regulate themselves emotionally;
- Fulfilling the needs for care, love and protection in accordance with the personal age and capabilities;
- Adequate presence and informing;
- Supporting community (neighbours, friends, teachers, doctors, psychologists, priests);
- Keeping faith in the forces of good, in evolution and development!



The parent's presence and involvement is vital for the child!
A lonely child, trapped in her own world, suffers more than she would if she were together with her parents, facing potential war situations.



Children and teenagers have more resources than we think!

They have life's strength and energy!

They have the capacity to resist and to recover from adversities.



Trust yourself and your child!

Take care of yourself while you care for your child too!

