

What Happens in Therapy?

Denver Children's Advocacy Center



This information is excerpted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network – visit www.nctsn.org for more information on child trauma.

There are many approaches to outpatient psychotherapy, which may occur in individual, group, or family sessions. Treatment for your child may involve the following:

- Talking with your child or having him or her draw or play with toys in order to get a better understanding of what he or she is experiencing, feeling, or thinking.
- Asking about your child's experience of the traumatic event, and other areas in his or her life, such as how the child is getting along with family, friends, teachers, and other students in school.
- Assessing your child's strengths, skills, and talents, as well as problems.
- Engaging with your child (while taking into account age and emotional maturity) to try to understand the traumatic experience, including the ways it has affected daily life.
- Teaching a variety of evidence-based treatment techniques such as relaxation methods and problem-solving skills, and including, in some cases, interventions with the school and family or referral for medication.

The goal of treatment is to help your child to address feelings of helplessness and worries over safety and to identify helpful thoughts and actions. Because trauma can interrupt a child's normal development, therapy helps in reducing the symptoms of child traumatic stress, as well as offering your child support and guidance to return to age-appropriate activities. Your child's therapist will probably ask for your participation and cooperation, because these are extremely important to the recovery of your children and the well-being of your family.

Many effective treatments include the following principles:

- Education about the impact of trauma
- Helping children and their parents establish or reestablish a sense of safety
- Techniques for dealing with overwhelming emotional reactions
- An opportunity to talk about the traumatic experience in a safe, accepting environment
- Involvement, when possible, of primary caregivers in the healing process