

When Trauma Happens, Love Heals

Children who go through traumatic experiences have worse health outcomes when they are adults. Examples of trauma include abuse and neglect, but also living in a community where violence regularly occurs, not being sure where your next meal is coming from, experiencing bullying, being in foster care or having a parent with a mental illness or who is in prison.

Research consistently shows that in all communities, regardless of socioeconomic status, at least two thirds of adults have had at least one of these experiences. When you add in the stress carried by our veterans or the daily grinding reality of experiences of discrimination and racism, it is no exaggeration to say that we are a traumatized nation.

But we also know that not everyone who experiences trauma has long-term health issues. Research shows that simple acts of kindness and caring can heal our brains, bodies and spirits and even protect us from stress. Loving kindness, trust-worthy relationships, a sense of meaning and purpose, rhythm and ritual actually help to re-wire our brains and ease the release of toxic hormones that can create chronic disease.

Fostering healing and protecting our children from the effects of violence, abuse, neglect and other traumas can be quite simple. As people of faith, the things that we do together in our congregations to practice love and human kindness and to share the rich wisdom of our faith traditions can literally heal the body.

Prayer: Healing God, help us live out the simple acts of love and care that can heal and transform lives.

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5 Healing Gestures

Want to protect children from the effects of violence, abuse, neglect, hunger and other traumas? These simple practices or Healing Gestures, can help children thrive.

- 1. Celebrate.** As influential adults, you can help children celebrate with “put-ups” and “not put-downs.” A cheer, a clap, a smile, a kind greeting or a statement that acknowledges them are simple expressions that can heal minds, change minds, and help children thrive.
- 2. Comfort.** Studies show that adults who provide consistent emotional and physical support can buffer the “fight or flight” stress response in children. Teaching them how to manage their emotions and calm themselves down, helping them connect their words to feelings, and practicing relaxation and emotional regulation skills can also help.
- 3. Listen.** To listen is a gesture we practice every day. For all children, especially those who have experienced traumatic stress and violence, a patient and receptive adult who listens can help them feel safe and valued.
- 4. Collaborate.** Through everyday interactions, you can teach children the skills to collaborate and resolve problems by modeling cooperative relationships, helping them build trust, and encouraging them to express their opinions and ask for help when needed.
- 5. Inspire.** Think back to when you were a child. Do you recall a glimmering moment when your spirit soared in response to words an adult said to you? When their words elevated your sense of self and inspired you to do something big? So inspire the children in your life, and give them their own glimmering moments to remember.

From the Changing Minds Now campaign. U.S. Department of Justice and Futures Without Violence. www.changingmindsnow.org.

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