



When something bad has happened

Workbook for adults

Preface

A note to practitioners

This workbook was created by the Barnahus Team within the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Trauma Unit for the Stockholm region. We have drawn inspiration from established treatment models (such as TF-CBT, CFTSI, etc.), as well as our clinical experience of working with children at Barnahus in Stockholm.

The workbook is designed for adults who are offered crisis support along with their children. It is our hope that the contents of this workbook will make crisis support work easier for children, young people, caregivers and practitioners.

The contents of the workbook are not intended to be used in a particular order and we do not think everything in the book should be used for everyone. The book can be used in different ways, in accordance with the unique needs and experiences of the individual you are supporting.

As authors, we have based the workbook on established knowledge about trauma, trauma symptoms and interventions, and tailored its contents to reflect the nature of crisis support as a short and limited intervention. The contents are written by us and the words are our responsibility. We have borrowed ideas from and been inspired by colleagues from a range of professions in our current and previous places of work. We are grateful for the support, feedback and inspiration we have received along the way.

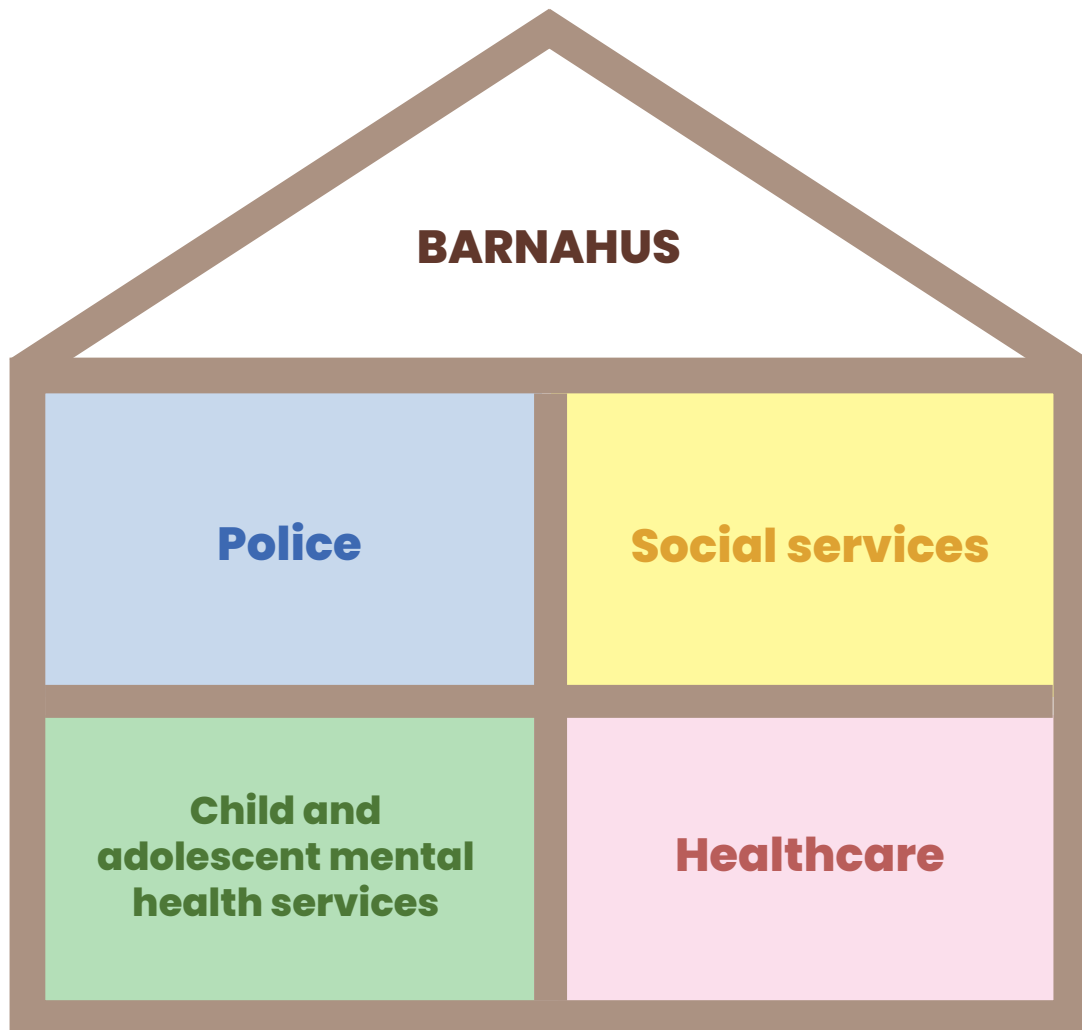
The workbook should be used for what we call child psychiatric crisis support. It has been developed in the context of child psychiatry and we think that as a practitioner, you should have basic child psychiatric skills. Please note that practitioners should only use the workbook and apply it in their crisis support work after consulting the accompanying Handbook.

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Welcome!



Crisis support

We are going to be working on what we call child psychiatric crisis support. It is a shorter treatment intervention that focuses on the child's mental health. When it is disclosed that a child has experienced or witnessed frightening events such as violence or sexual abuse, this evokes strong reactions in both children and adults. Children who are victims of crime, along with their families, are normally in contact with social services, and a police investigation will normally be underway or have been completed. All of this, and what the child experienced, affects the whole family in many ways. The crisis affects both the child and the parent, and it can be challenging and difficult to be a parent or caregiver in such a situation.

Crisis support aims to

- **provide better understanding of how we react when difficult things have happened**
- **alleviate reactions and symptoms**
- **give children the opportunity to talk about and understand what happened**
- **Improve communication between the child and adult/parent in a way that supports the child in coping with difficult emotions and thoughts**

Crisis support is based on talking and exercises. You, your child and I are going to talk about how your child is feeling. What are crisis reactions and how do they manifest themselves? What can help or alleviate those reactions? What can you do as a parent to help your child? What do you need as a parent to help your child?

You know your child better than anyone else, so your thoughts and observations are vital. During the crisis support, we will carry out an assessment together with you and your child. Towards the end of our sessions, we will discuss whether continued treatment is going to be needed.

Mapping exercise

We are all affected by everything that happens around us. So that they can cope with difficult thoughts and emotions, children need help to identify and reduce ongoing external stress. Because you, as their parent, are so important to your child, the stress you experience also affects your child. Therefore, we want to map out how things look for you and your child today. How has life changed for you and your child? What worries you?

Cooperation between parents:

Contact issues/custody issues:

Living arrangements:

Childcare/school:

Safety/protection:

Medical needs/healthcare:

Legal issues, for example, legal proceedings or custody disputes:

Finances:

Other:

The need for support

In a crisis or during a longer period of severe stress, it can often take a huge effort as a parent to deal with all the practicalities of everyday life. The acute crisis may involve extra strain and major changes, but it may also involve serious stress that has existed for a long time. What support do you as a parent and you as a family currently have?

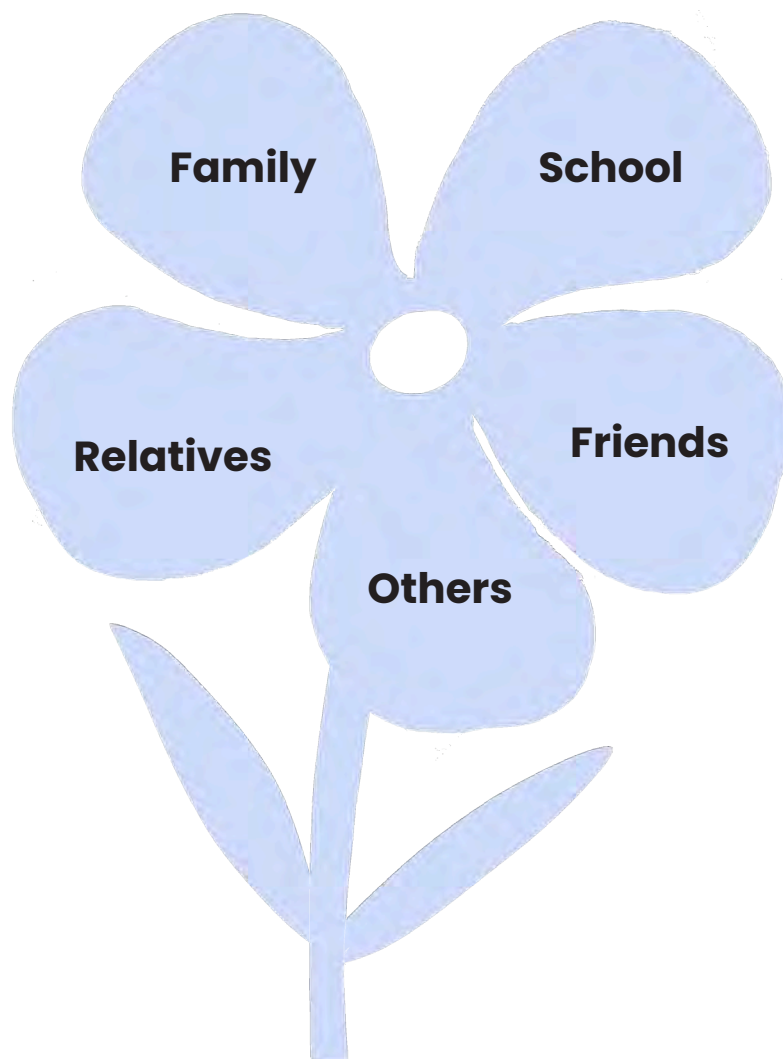
Social Services:

Network:

Healthcare for your own physical and mental health:

Other:

Is there any support that is missing?



Short-term foster care



For children who are placed in short-term foster care, their departure from home is frequently immediate. The child will often have prior experience of difficult events and prolonged stress. To the “backpack” of experiences the child is carrying, a move is now added, which itself can present a crisis. The move means a separation from important people and the loss of familiar routines at home, school and in their free time.

The short-term foster home and social services have the responsibility to create a secure environment where the child can find peace and receive the emotional support they need. A stable life forms the basis of a child’s positive development and is necessary for them to be able deal with the impact of their past experiences.

As a short-term foster parent, you have a significant role in the child’s life, even if the time you will spend together will be limited. Understanding the child’s experiences and how they perceive their situation and their future is essential. That understanding provides the foundations that enable you to respond to the child’s thoughts, feelings and behaviours in a supportive way.

Being a short-term foster carer is difficult and challenging, and it is vital that they too receive the right support and that the best possible conditions are in place.

Do you have the information you think you need about the child, the child's background and the reasons the child has been placed with you?

Do you know how long the child will live with you? Is there long-term planning in place?

What sort of support do you receive as a short-term foster parent? Supervision? Support from a short-term foster care consultant? Social services?

Do you have an established relationship with the school/pre-school?

Are you involved in the child's contact with their legal guardians?

What challenges do you see?

Violence against and abuse of children

Violence

Violence can be both physical and psychological. Examples of physical violence are when someone hits, shoves, bites, pinches, kicks or shakes you. Physical violence also includes, as examples, being locked in a wardrobe, or being locked out on a balcony. Psychological violence includes when someone says abusive and derogatory things to you repeatedly. It also includes threats, aggressive outbursts or being controlled by someone.

Honour-based violence means being controlled and restricted in what you do, how you act and who you associate with. Disobeying these restrictions is considered to damage the family's reputation or honour and can lead to the person affected being threatened with violence or being abused.

Seeing or hearing a loved one being hit can be just as frightening and harmful as it happening to you yourself. It could be a parent is being hit, parents hitting each other, an older sibling hitting a parent or a parent hitting a sibling. Since 2021, it has been a crime for children in Sweden to witness violence against a person to whom they have a close relationship.

Despite the fact it is harmful for children and young people to witness violence, it is relatively common. When surveyed, one in four young people in Sweden said they had been exposed to violence committed by an adult. Half of those say it was from a parent. Just under 15 per cent have experienced violence between adults in their family.



Violence can affect children and young people in different ways. Witnessing violence by someone who has a close relationship with the child, whose role it is to provide love and safety, has a greater affect than if it is a stranger. Living with the person who uses violence, for example a parent, stepparent, a sibling or a boyfriend or girlfriend, means the child almost never feels safe. It is also more stressful if it is someone the child needs to see every day, such as a schoolmate. Whether the child witnesses violence once or many times also has an impact on how much the child is affected.

It can be difficult to tell someone about being hit or abused, and it can take a long time for a child to feel able to tell someone about violence. There is often a fear that the person hitting them will get angry and that the situation will get worse. Children may also be afraid that the person hitting them will get into trouble. It is common for children to believe it is their fault that they have been hit or abused. The person committing the violence may even have told them that. It is important to be clear that it is the person who is violent who is responsible. It is the responsibility of the adult to be able to manage the situation without using violence. There are other ways of dealing with anger than hitting someone.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is more common than many people think. Studies show that one in four young people have experienced sexual abuse at some point during their childhood. In most cases, the abuser is someone the child knows, for example a parent, a relative, a teacher, a coach or a peer. But the perpetrator may also be someone they don't know.

Sexual abuse can be someone touching your private body parts, for example the genitals, buttocks or breasts. It may also involve different types of sexual acts such as vaginal abuse, oral abuse or anal abuse. Sexual abuse can also include being forced to look at or touch someone's genitals or being forced to watch someone perform a sexual act. Being forced or blackmailed into showing your own body or into doing sexual things to yourself is also sexual abuse. This can happen both online and in real life. It can also be someone photographing, filming or peeking when you are in the shower or getting changed. Someone forcing a child to watch or look at porn in videos, images on the Internet or magazines is also sexual abuse.

Children and young people who are sexually abused react in different ways, both when the abuse is taking place and afterwards. It depends both on the child or young person's past experiences and temperament, and on how the abuse occurs. A person who sexually abuses a child often uses threats, violence or manipulation to get what they want. For younger children who have been sexually abused, it may not necessarily have been frightening, but perhaps more confusing. It is common not to

scream or struggle when sexual abuse takes place. That can be because you are afraid to, or feel hopeless, or because you don't want to take in what is happening. Often this happens unconsciously. The brain decides that you are going to stay still – as a kind of protection against what is happening. Afterwards, the person can think that they should have done more to try to stop it. Physical reactions can be hard to understand. Sometimes the body reacts to sexual stimulation during an abusive situation even though the person does not want to. This can make it is very difficult to tell someone what you have been subjected to. But the abuse took place against the person's will, even if they didn't scream or struggle. We do not choose how we react when we are subjected to abuse.

If a child has experienced sexual abuse, there is help and support available. They may need to process what has happened and there needs to be good support in their everyday life. Unfortunately, it sometimes takes a long time before a child will feel able to tell someone that they have been abused. Children and young people may be worried about what will happen to the perpetrator and to them themselves when they disclose the abuse. It is also common to feel fear, shame and guilt. Children often think they have done something that has led to the sexual abuse. It is important that the child is told that it is always the perpetrator who is responsible, regardless of what the child has done or felt.

Exposure to abuse online

Grooming means that an adult contacts a child or young person with the aim of sexually exploiting them. Another word for grooming is manipulation and that is a good way of describing what the victim has experienced. People who target young people online entice, persuade intimidate, threaten and exploit them in ways that are hard to withstand. Online abuse can affect you just as seriously as abuse that happens in person. The young person often has strong feelings of guilt and shame for being tricked online and may mistakenly think that it is their fault they were targeted.

When your child experienced this, it is important to show them that the blame lies with the perpetrator. They can easily feel they are being doubted if adults ask why they sent pictures or why they continued to have contact with the perpetrator. They have often been intimidated or tricked into the situation and are afraid of what the perpetrator might do if they stop sharing material or if they tell someone.

Young people who have been targeted online often feel very unsafe. They may feel watched, fear meeting their abuser again, and worry that their abuser lied about who they are. They may worry that pictures or videos will be spread online or that other people will see them. The sense of shame they feel over having been tricked may be deep and may make it very hard to talk about what happened. Since often the abuse took place at home, over the phone, on a tablet or a computer, this can lead to

feelings of discomfort in their own room or entire home.

It can take time for the authorities to investigate crimes committed online, as there are often many victims of the same person. It is often most difficult when what your child has been through becomes known to others. Even if the legal process is taking a long time, life can usually return to normal after a while, despite the awful things that have happened.

As an adult, it is natural to want to protect your child from what can happen online. Adults should increase their knowledge about what young people are doing online and show an interest in which digital platforms and games they are using. But banning a child or young people from going online or using social media is not usually a good way forward, because the young person will often have positive interactions and activities online. A ban risks damaging your relationship. The strongest protective factor for young people is to have a trusting relationship with adults who do not judge or get angry if they tell them that bad things have happened.

Reactions after violence and abuse

When we go through something that frightens us, it affects us in different ways. The ways we react are called stress reactions or crisis reactions. Normally these reactions subside with time, if life is otherwise stable and you have support from those around you. If the reactions persist for longer, they are called trauma symptoms.

Being physically, sexually, or psychologically abused, or seeing someone you are in close relationship with being abused, is a potentially traumatising event. Not everyone who experiences such events develops trauma symptoms. The risk of long-term symptoms increases if we experience frightening events repeatedly and if the perpetrator is someone we are close to.

When a very frightening or stressful event happens, the body reacts quickly and instinctively. Reactions are automatic and are not something we can control. The brain deals with the perceived threat based on survival mechanisms in the autonomic nervous system. You usually talk about three such responses: fight, flight and freeze.

Fight

means we try to protect ourselves physically by resisting or fighting back.

Flight

means we try to get away from the situation.

Freeze

means that the body stiffens up and we feel as though we are paralysed and incapacitated. This reaction is common in the case of sexual abuse and kicks in when a dangerous situation is perceived as overpowering.

After going through frightening or upsetting things, it is normal to have strong emotions which are difficult to cope with. This can affect how the body works, for example causing stomach or headaches or being constant tense. It is common for people to find it hard to relax and have difficulties sleeping.

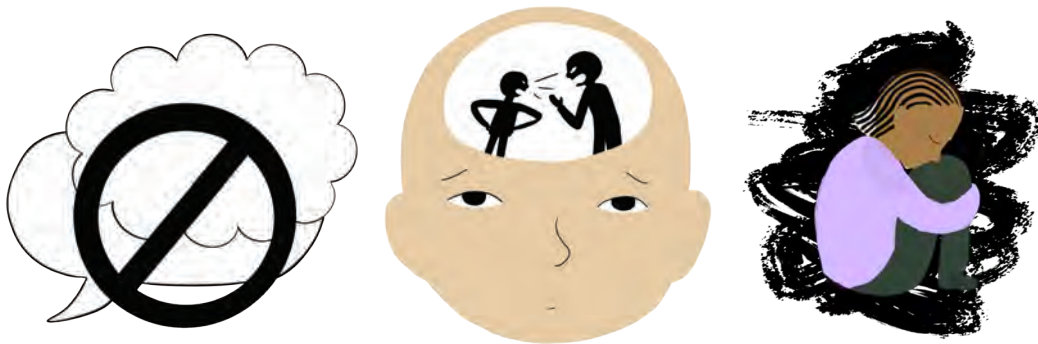
The way the brain works can also be affected after frightening events. Our brains are programmed to react quickly to dangers. It is as though the brain has an alarm system which warns us if something scary seems to be happening, and makes us prepared to run away quickly, play dead or perhaps go on the attack. The alarm is there to protect us, but when it is activated, we have trouble thinking clearly. If we have experienced frightening situations, the brain can be especially prepared for dangers and the alarm goes off more often, more quickly and more intensely. It reacts to anything that reminds it of danger, even when it doesn't need to. We call these triggers.

Trauma-related triggers are things that remind you of the traumatic event: sounds, smells, tastes, people, places or a feeling in your body. Examples of triggers include someone raising their voice or having the same facial expression as the person who harmed you. Being triggered means that you are reminded of the traumatic event. Memories often pop up suddenly and feel unpleasant.



Common trauma symptoms

Described below are common reactions to stress and trauma symptoms in children and young people. If someone has many of these reactions, we call it post-traumatic stress syndrome or PTSD. Some of the symptoms are noticeable to the people around the child, whereas other symptoms, such as those you think or feel, can be hard to recognise. You may just notice that the child is behaving differently or seems distant and withdrawn.



Re-experiencing

It is common for bad memories and thoughts about what happened to pop up in your head when you don't want them to. The brain replays what you experienced as if it were a film. These are called flashbacks. It is usually hard to stop thinking about the bad things that have happened. Nightmares are common and are also a form of re-experiencing. For younger children, this can take the form of repetitive play relating to their experience.

Avoidance

A natural reaction when something bad has happened is to try not to think about it, so as to avoid the discomfort the thoughts give rise to. Examples of avoidance include not wanting to be in places that or meet people who remind you of the bad experience. Many children and young people would rather not talk about what they have been through. It is understandable to want to forget thoughts and feelings associated with difficult events. As adults we also tend to avoid reminding the child of the frightening event, as we do not want to make the child feel uncomfortable. However, avoidance unfortunately tends not to help people deal with what they have been through in the long term, but rather prolongs the suffering.

Feeling overly tense

After something frightening has happened, the brain and the body can be on edge and you can find it hard to relax. Some people are easily angered and irritated. This might be noticed through the child having frequent outbursts or acting out towards others. It is also common to get scared easily and constantly be alert to danger, and to find it hard to concentrate and hard to fall sleep.

Negative thoughts

It is common for children and young people to have negative thoughts about themselves, the world and the future after something bad has happened. Activities you normally like doing are no longer enjoyable and you might have feelings of guilt. To others, the child may appear tired and depressed.

Feelings of unreality (depersonalisation-derealisation)

Some children and young people who have experienced frightening events can have feelings of unreality, such as, for example, feeling like you are not really there, feeling like you are in a bubble or that you hear voices that aren't there. This can feel very unpleasant and can be difficult to talk about for fear that others will think you are losing your mind, but it is actually a sign of severe stress. From the outside, this can look like the child becoming distant for a while and not seeming to be present in conversations or activities, or their behaviour changing frequently.

Difficulties trusting other people

When we experience a traumatic event, we often feel that the world is not as safe and predictable as before. This leads to us to try to be prepared for new dangerous things to happen. We can find it hard to trust other people. It can take time to see the world as a safe place again, and to realise that most people have your best interests at heart.

Behaviours of concern

Reacting strongly to a difficult event is completely normal. But there are certain behaviours which people around the child or young person need to pay special attention to prevent the situation from getting worse.

Putting yourself or others at risk

For some young people who have experienced frightening events, one consequence may be that they seek out or end up in dangerous situations afterwards. This might, for example, involve drinking too much alcohol, using drugs, or ending up in situations where you are sexually exposed [1] physically or online. This can be a way of trying to deal with difficult feelings in the moment, of trying to gain a sense of control or of escaping to something else that can distract or numb strong feelings of, for example, shame, guilt, loneliness or feelings of inadequacy in the moment. These behaviours risk leading to a deterioration in mental health and the person being exposed to violence again. For you as an adult, it is important to try not to get angry even if you are very worried. Instead, try to understand the function of the behaviour for the young person and help them to find other strategies for managing strong emotions. We often need to get professional help to reduce dangerous behaviours.

Sometimes a child or young person who themselves was abused goes on to harm other children, for example through sexualised behaviour that is unusual for the child's development. For younger children, this may involve a preoccupation with playing sexual games with other children. In general, sexual play between children is common. What may be characterised as harmful sexual behaviour in younger children is characterised by play that is non-reciprocal, elements of threats or violence, a strong preoccupation with this in the child, and a failure to respect other children's boundaries. In teenagers, it can involve sexually abusing others. It can be difficult to know what is normal sexual behaviour in younger children and what is harmful. It is therefore a good idea to seek professional advice. If the child or young person is in fact harming others, it is essential to get help quickly.

Anger

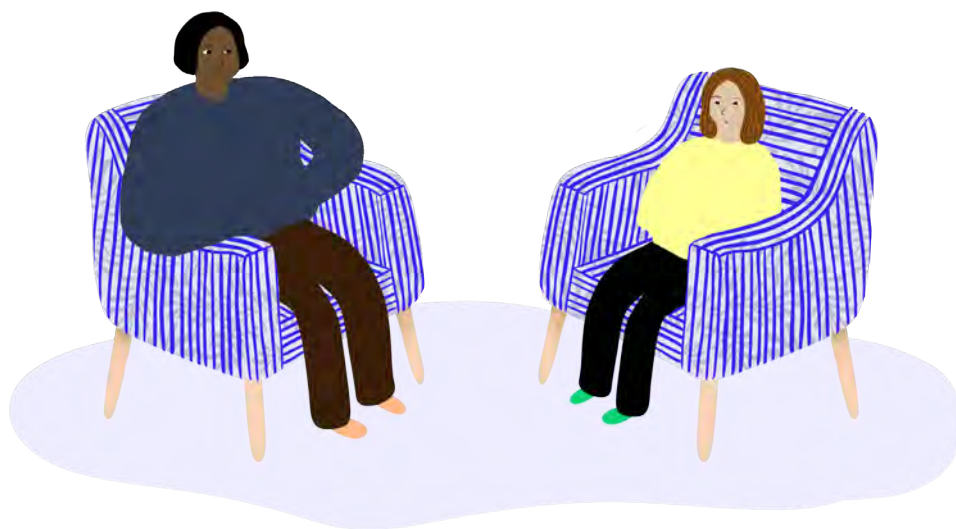
Children who have experienced a lot of stress often become irritated and angry more easily. For some, this leads to a lot of conflicts with others in the family or at school. Outbursts and aggressive behaviour are common. Some also abuse others. It is challenging for a parent to deal with constant conflicts and irritability, and it can also evoke anger in the adult. It is important to remember that the child's anger is a reaction to severe stress, and sometimes also a way of repeating something they themselves were subjected to.

Depression and anxiety

Some children who have been through frightening events withdraw from friends or their family. If you have experienced a lot of stress, you may develop more general symptoms of anxiety and worry. This can involve finding it difficult to be away from parents, or other types of fears and concerns. Children can begin to behave as if they were younger. They may find it difficult to manage things on their own or need to sleep alongside an adult. It is common to have these reactions when something bad has happened and it is important to give your child the extra care or support they need. Over time, they usually find their way back to their usual level of functioning.

Self-harm behaviours and suicidal thoughts

Some children and young people may harm themselves when they do not have other ways of coping with difficult emotions or internal pain. Sometimes children and young people can [1] feel that life is so hard, they cannot cope with living. For some young people, this can lead to them attempting to take their own life or spending a lot of time thinking about how they could do that. As a parent, you may be reluctant to ask your child about these things for fear that it could reawaken these thoughts or lead to the child starting to consider these behaviours. But actually, by asking you are showing them that you care about them and that you want to and dare to talk about difficult things. You should try to be calm, listen and try to understand your child's thoughts and feelings that lie behind those behaviours. Being able to talk about difficult thoughts and feelings is a first step towards feeling better and finding new ways of dealing with hard things. If a child harms themselves or has thoughts about not living, it is necessary to seek professional help.

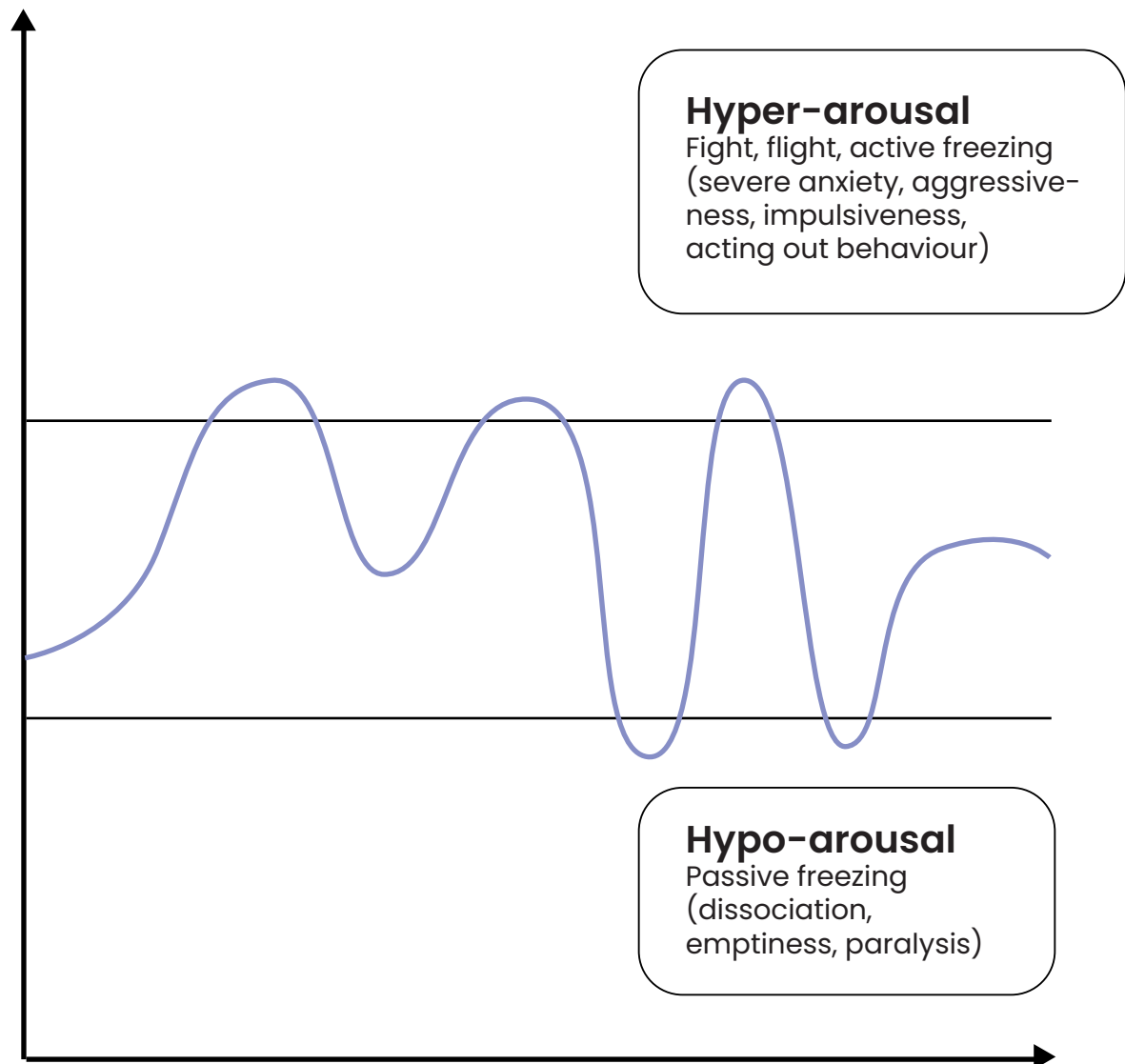


Window of tolerance

We described earlier how we function when stressed using the metaphor of the brain's alarm system. The window of tolerance is another way to describe how we are affected. It is a model which explains the range within which an individual can tolerate their perceived stress. When they are in their window of tolerance, a child can develop and learn new things. As long as they are there, they can focus, think clearly about different experiences and feel in control of their reactions. When children experience too much stress, they feel threatened or very worried and have trouble regulating their emotions, meaning they are outside their window of tolerance. The child reacts either with anger, acting out behaviour or impulsivity, which is called hyper-arousal, or they react with hypo-arousal, as in depression, dissociation or emotional detachment. Regardless of how the child reacts to stress, they need help to feel safe and thereby return to their window of tolerance.

When you see that a child has a strong reaction, you need to find out why. You need to think about what happened before in order to try to understand what triggered the reaction and how to prevent it from happening again. When the child is calm again and in their window of tolerance, you can talk to them about this and what it was that helped, so you gain an understanding of how you as an adult can help them to calm down next time.

How wide an individual's window of tolerance is varies. Younger children have a narrower window of tolerance and are more dependent on their parents for regulating their emotions. Helping young children to regulate their emotions and their activity and stress levels is often fairly obvious to parents. However, for older children, parents usually find it more difficult to see and understand how they can help. Often you need think through and plan in advance what to do to increase the child's feeling of safety and help them calm down.



Parents' own reactions

A child's ability to recover after experiencing a traumatic event is related to how their caregiver or parent is feeling and can cope with stress. For a child to be able to recover, they need supportive adults around them. As a parent, it is natural that you are affected by your child's experiences. In addition, if you as a parent have been exposed to the same situation as your child, you too may develop trauma symptoms. If you were abused earlier in your life, the new situation may bring back your past trauma symptoms.

Even if you yourself have not experienced a traumatic event, the fact that your child has can expose you as a parent to their stress reactions, or lead to internal unpleasant intrusive images of what your child has disclosed. Some adults develop their own trauma symptoms. The symptoms are the same as those set out above: bad memories and thoughts, avoiding thoughts, emotions or situations that remind you of what happened, increased arousal, which can present as difficulty concentrating, sleep problems and hypervigilance, difficulty trusting others, negative thoughts or feelings of unreality.

As you as a parent need to be able to support your child during this period, it is important that you take care of yourself so that you can be there for the child. Parents who are severely stressed often forget their own needs and focus on the child's wellbeing. In the same way as on an airplane you have to put on your own oxygen mask first as an adult to be able to help your child, you need to take care of yourself to be able to support your child. This may include maintaining good sleeping, eating and exercise habits, and receiving emotional support from people in your network.

If you feel badly affected by your own stress reactions after what happened, it is a good idea to seek support or treatment for yourself. In doing so, you will also be helping your child and being a good role model to them for dealing with difficult situations in life.

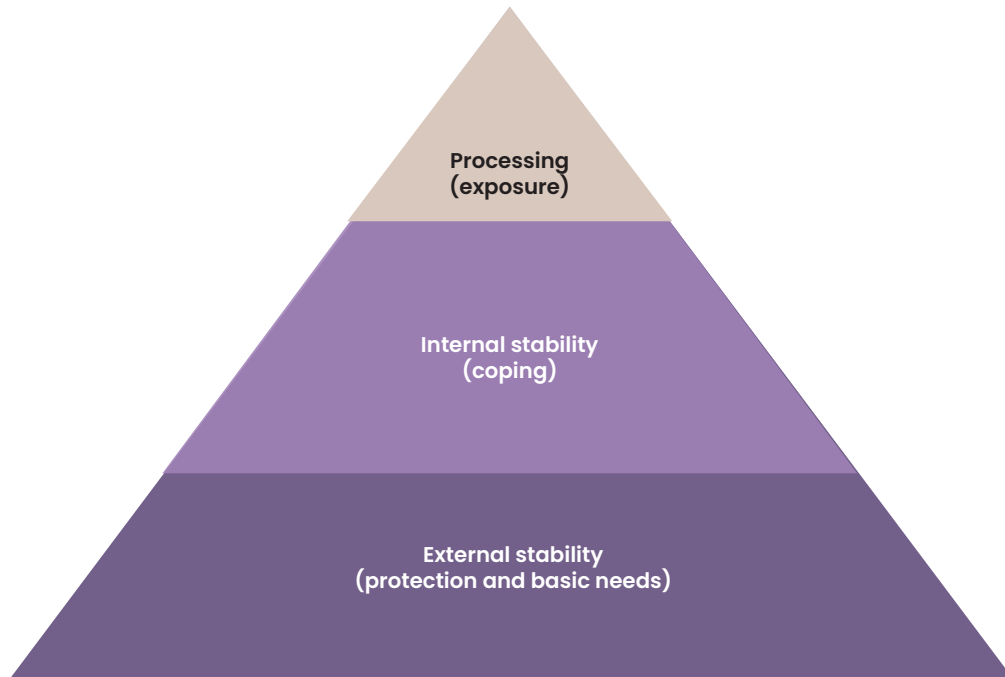
Which stress reactions have you noticed in yourself?

What can you do to take care of yourself?

What do you need to be able to support your child?



What you can do as a parent



We usually describe what children and young people need after a frightening event with the help of the stability pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid is what all children who have experienced potentially traumatising events need, that is, external stability. This could be, for example, that they know where they are going to live, where they are going school and that they are protected from being hurt again. We usually talk about warmth, rest and nourishment, meaning that children need to be loved and cared for, to be able to sleep and be comfortable, and to be properly fed. A stressed nervous system needs calm and safety to be able to recover. In other words, external stability is very much about having a secure living environment.

The next level of the pyramid is internal stability, meaning you are reasonably stable on the inside. When you have been through traumatic experiences, it is common to have many strong and difficult emotions. Both children and parents need to learn about common ways of reacting to stressful events to better understand their own reactions. In this respect it is also important to learn good coping strategies, for example, how to calm yourself down, which you can then use when you are feeling bad. Children and young people need a lot of emotional support after experiencing frightening events.

For many children, receiving help with a secure and stable external living environment and greater emotional support is enough. However, some children need continued trauma-focused therapy, which also includes work on processing, the top section of the pyramid. This involves talking through what you have been through with a therapist in a calm and controlled way. You work on “unloading” your trauma memories relating to overwhelming emotions in different ways by gradually getting used to your frightening experiences.

For your child to be able to feel better, the most important thing is that what frightened them is no longer happening. After going through something traumatic, life must return to feeling stable and predictable, and we need to be around people we feel safe with. The more secure and stable life is, the more the brain is able to cope with bad feelings and thoughts.

It is important to maintain routines for your child, even if they do not always feel like it. Eating and sleeping properly are extremely important. Going to school, seeing friends and going to clubs and activities are all good things. Physical activity usually helps as well. Even if your child has been able to manage many routines on their own in the past, an adult often needs to step in and provide extra help when the child is feeling bad.

Finding fun things to do with your child: what do you both enjoy doing?

Even without traumatic and difficult events, life is full of things that can be stressful or make us feel under pressure. Stress is not dangerous in itself, but there has to be a balance between stress and recovery. This is always important, but it is particularly important when you are feeling bad. Recovery can look like rest and sleep, but it can also look like doing something you like or that relaxes you.

How do things look for your child? What can cause stress for them, for example at school, in their free time, with friends and at home? What needs to change?

Children and young people can react in different ways when they have experienced frightening events. Often the child's behaviour shows us that they are not feeling well. As an adult, how difficult it is to deal with these behaviours varies. For some people, it can be difficult to cope with a child acting out and causing "trouble", while others may find it harder to respond when the child withdraws and becomes quiet, needs more closeness and does not want to be alone, or when the child talks a lot about the traumatic event.

In what situations do you find it most difficult to respond to your child?

Talking to your child about what happened

When something frightening or bad has happened, it can be hard to know how to talk about it with your child. Which words should you use? How much should you say? How will the child react? Many adults' instinct is to protect the child against the bad thing, which sometimes can lead to avoiding talking about it. Instead, you need to try to communicate more about what happened, in order to avoid confusion and misunderstandings, and so that the child is not left alone with difficult questions. Talking about it also helps alleviate feelings of guilt and shame, as many children can think that what happened was their fault.

It is recommended to use straight-forward and precise language. Often it is easy to become unclear and vague when talking about difficult things, for example, saying "argued" instead of saying "mum screamed and pulled your hair". By using precise words, it becomes clearer what is okay (arguing) and what is not okay (intimidating or hurting someone). Start from what the child has said or what you actually know and avoid adding

frightening details or your own interpretations. It can help to distinguish between then and now and to explain the steps taken to help the child become safe and secure. You can describe what the police and social services are doing to make things better for the child and to prevent the frightening thing from happening again. If you don't have answers to the child's questions, you can tell them that. The most important thing is to signal to the child that it is okay to talk about what happened and that you want to listen. Children vary in how much and in what way they want to talk about what they have been through, so it is important to be sensitive and responsive if and when the child opens up.

Even when you are not talking directly about their bad experiences, there are different ways to make it easier for the child to talk about what they are feeling or thinking. You can show them that when they want to talk, you will make time for them and listen, no matter what it is about. This helps the child understand that they can come and talk to you about anything. You can help the child to verbalise their feelings and express themselves in different ways. Young children often find it easier to express themselves in play. Sometimes it might feel good to read books together and discuss what the characters have been through or are feeling.

It is important to remember that it is never too late to start talking about what happened.

While a police investigation is ongoing, you need to be thoughtful about how the child should be asked about what they have experienced. Children are not helped by being "interrogated" by their parents about exactly what happened. However, it is always good to listen to your child when they are telling you something, and to talk and ask how they are feeling. You can seek advice from the police and social services if you are unsure.



Handling conflicts

In many families, more conflicts arise after something bad has happened. Many children act out more after experiencing something frightening. This is common among younger children, but is seen in all age groups. It is important that the child's environment is predictable and safe with boundaries and routines, and it is important to remember to communicate these calmly. Behind the child's challenging behaviour is an immense need to be loved and cared for.

Lots of different things affect how much conflict occurs in a family. Right now, there may be a lot of uncertainties that you or your child cannot influence. This may involve a change in accommodation, a police investigation, the child's deteriorating wellbeing or other stressful circumstances. What you as a parent or significant adult can influence is, above all, how you treat the child.

A good principle for the child-parent relationship is the 5:1 ratio, that is to say, there should be five times more encouragement and positive interactions than demands and reprimands. If there are a lot of conflicts, you may need to add more positive interactions and encouragement. When you are regularly getting into arguments and you have low energy levels, it is easy to reduce the positive time together instead, with the result that conflicts and nagging just increase. Here are some exercises and techniques which can be helpful for achieving a better balance.



Child-led time

Set aside 10 to 15 minutes and let the child choose between a few activities you both like. Give your full attention to them for this period. Let the child lead and verbalise what they are doing. Show them that you appreciate this time. Try to have a period of child-led time every

Recognise what works well

Getting attention is important to everyone, and getting a parent's attention is especially important to children. Behaviour that is noticed is behaviour that will increase, and this irrespective of whether the attention is positive or negative. It is therefore good to recognise positive behaviour and try to minimise attention in relation to less good behaviour – try to divert their attention instead of telling them off.

Think of it as picking our battles; in other words, just let go of the less important thing for now. It is good for both reducing the number of negative interactions between you and your child and reducing the attention around the unwanted behaviour, and as a result the behaviour becomes less interesting for the child. Sometimes we need help to reflect on our daily lives to figure out what matters most and what can be put to one side for now.

Preparations

Are there situations where conflicts tend to arise? The times of day at which problems typically arise are when we are getting ready in the morning and just before going to bed at night. Is it possible to avoid those situations? By writing down clearly the routines that were agreed upon at a time of calm, we can reduce the number of conflicts which arise during the morning or evening rush. A piece of fruit in the afternoon at pick-up time may prevent the worst of the anger caused by hunger.

Prepare the child for changes of activities or new things in a calm and clear manner. Make sure the child is listening to you, express yourself clearly and kindly and make one request at a time. Give the child time to do what you have asked and try not to nag them.

Tackling a problem

Sometimes you need to change something that affects the child's well-being. For example, it may be that the school situation is not working, that there are frequent conflicts at home or problems in daily life with friends, social contacts, routines or other things that have a negative impact.

You can use the method below to make a change. To solve a problem together, it is important for both the child and the adults to agree there is a problem and they want to make a change. Make sure the problem-solving becomes a joint project which is described in positive terms. To be most effective, it should be done when you have time to sit down in peace and quiet and when those involved are not stressed or upset. The method can also be used by the adults in the family to bring about change.

What is the problem? Write it down as specifically as possible.

How would you like it to be instead?

Write down as many solutions as you can think of. Brainstorm. There are no bad suggestions. Write them all down without assessing them.

Discuss and consider the advantages and disadvantages of some of the suggestions you have written down.

Choose a solution or a combination of solutions.

Decide when you are going to evaluate the suggestion (in a week, after a month, etc).

Try out what you have decided.

Monitor and evaluate. Are you going to continue or try out another suggestion?

Relaxation

When we experience scary or difficult events, the body often becomes more tense. Even once the threat is over, it is as though the body and brain still believe that we are in danger. In the same way, we often tense up when we are stressed or upset.

When we are under acute stress, we produce stress hormones to be able to quickly cope with the situation and increase the capacity of our organs. The first hormone released in response to perceived danger is nor-adrenaline, which increases our concentration and attention. The second hormone secreted is adrenaline, which causes us to breathe faster and start to tremble. The third is cortisol, which increases energy and stamina. This makes us prepared for danger, and our bodies and minds are ready to cope with life-threatening situations.

These are natural reactions which help us get through the danger. It is only when the reactions do not stop that it becomes harmful. Being exposed to stress for a long time has a negative effect on sleep and recovery. If it continues for too long, there is a risk of damage to the brain's different functions.

In very simple terms, the brain can be divided into two parts that help us with different things. Imagine the green and red lights at the pedestrian crossing. The safe system, which can also be called the thinking part of the brain, helps us in moments we feel safe and calm. We can interpret our surroundings, read other people's signals, play, reason and feel emotions like joy and calm. When the safe system is activated, we are able to develop and grow. We call this the green light. The second system, the emotional brain or the red light, kicks in when we feel anxious, threatened or stressed. When the stress system is activated, it gives us a single task: to seek protection and thus minimise stress and anxiety. As a parent, you need to help your child to get to the green light as often as possible.

If we practice relaxation, we can teach ourselves to become more calm and less tense. Relaxation reduces both stress reactions and muscle tension in the body. The body then sends signals to the brain, letting it know you are safe. This can lead to your child no longer being triggered as quickly, not as easily frightened and less on their guard.

Relaxation exercises that you do together on a regular basis are a way of helping your child get to the green light.

Exercises

These are exercises that you and your child can do together. Once you have tried doing the exercises with your practitioner, you can then do them at home, where you can guide your child through the exercise. Feel free to try out the exercises yourself. You may need to practise several times before you are able to use calming strategies in a stressful situation.

Muscle relaxation

Sit comfortably in a chair with your arms hanging over the sides and your feet firmly on the floor. Close your eyes or look down at the floor while you are doing this exercise. Imagine you are holding a lump of clay in your right hand. Squeeze the clay as hard as you can! Feel how hard your muscles in your hand and arm become. Count to five when you are squeezing and then drop the clay and let your hand hang down. Feel the difference when the muscles in your hand and arm are relaxed. Say to yourself: "my hand is relaxed". Now do the same thing, but with your left hand. You can do that with all parts of the body: arms, feet, legs, stomach, back, chest, shoulders and face. You can do this with one part of the body at a time or all at once.

Belly breathing

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your tummy so you can feel if it is your chest or tummy that changes when you breathe in and out. Imagine your tummy is a balloon. When you breathe in, you are inflating the balloon and your tummy puffs out. When you breathe out, you are releasing air from the balloon and your tummy sinks in. Try and breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. You can also lie down on your back. Place a soft toy on your tummy, breathe in so your tummy pushes out and the toy rises up. Then breathe out and let your tummy and the toy sink down.

Mindfulness

Sit comfortably or lie down and close your eyes if you like. Relax your stomach and take deep breaths all the way down to your stomach. Follow your breathing, in and out. If thoughts pop up, just note that they are there and return to focusing on your breathing. Continue with this for a few minutes.

Cooked spaghetti

Imagine spaghetti that is not cooked. It is straight, stiff and hard. Now we are going to try to be like the uncooked spaghetti. Stand on your tiptoes and stretch your arms up. Try to tense your whole body so that you are just like hard, uncooked spaghetti.

Then we put the spaghetti in the water and cook it. Notice how you become more and more relaxed and then soft and floppy like spaghetti. When you're finished, the cooked spaghetti will be lying on the floor, all soft and relaxed.

Shifting focus

It is difficult to decide not to think about bad things. This is an exercise in being able to focus on something else. Sit comfortably and take deep breaths down to your stomach. Describe, without judgement, three things you see, three things you hear and three things you feel in your body.

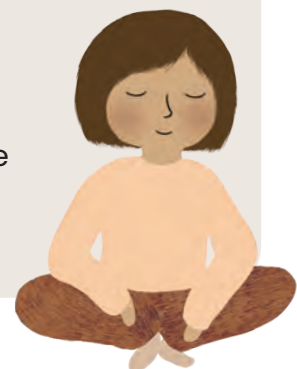
Shifting focus with the help of breathing

If you find yourself having very difficult thoughts about the future or past events, you can practise focusing on something that is here and now, such as counting your breaths. Count to one when you breathe in and two when you breathe out. Continue to ten and then start again. If you start thinking about something else, bring yourself back and carry on counting. Every time you lose focus and bring yourself back, you are practising focusing, and the more you practice, the easier it gets.

Leaves on a stream

Sit up straight and relax your shoulders. Lower your gaze to the floor in front of you and close your eyes slightly. Now shift your attention to your breathing. Feel how the air flows in through your nose, down through your throat and fills your lungs. Then breathe out again through your mouth. Try to follow the air's path through every breath.

Be open to any thoughts that may come up in the moment. Try not to get stuck in them – just take notice of them and then gently shift your attention back to your breathing.



Child massage

Sit behind your child and massage their back, neck and arms in the following ways. Ask the child to tell you what feels good to them and what does not feel good. If the child signals that something does not feel right, respond accordingly.

1. Clothes peg

Using two fingers, gently squeeze the child's neck and shoulders

2. Glasses

Draw a pair of glasses over the child's shoulder blades using your fingers

3. Bear claw

"Walk" with your palms of your hands over the child's back

4. Slide

Stroke your hands quickly downwards over the outer side of the child's arms

5. Rope climbing

"Climb" with your hands up the child's arms

6. Feathers

Stroke the child's back with your fingertips. Try not to tickle them

7. Rain

Drum lightly with all fingers on the child's back and shoulders.



Safe place

I den här övningen ska vi träna på att använda vår fantasi för att skapa positiva bilder och känslor. Ta några andetag och blunda. Föreställ dig en plats där du känner dig lugn och trygg. Det kan vara en verklig plats där du har varit, eller en plats som du hittar på själv. Föreställ dig att du står eller sitter på den platsen. Kan du se dig själv där? Föreställ dig att du ser dig omkring. Vad finns nära dig? Titta på detaljerna, undersök materialet, se de olika färgerna. Föreställ dig att du sträcker ut din hand och rör vid föremålet. Hur känns det? Titta nu längre bort. Vad finns där? Försök att se de olika färgerna och formerna. Det här är din speciella plats, och du kan föreställa dig vad du vill ska finnas där. Du känner dig lugn och tillfreds när du är där.

Imagine your bare feet are on the ground. How does it feel? Walk around slowly and look around you. What sounds can you hear? Perhaps the gentle breeze or birds or the sea. Perhaps you can feel the warmth of the sun on your face. What can you smell? Perhaps the smell of the sea or flowers or your favourite meal cooking on the stove? In your special place, you can see the things you want to see and hear the sounds you want to hear. You feel calm and happy.

Now imagine that someone special is with you in your place. It is someone who is there as a good friend, someone who is safe and kind. Someone who is there only to help you and who is going to take care of you. You feel happy to be with that person.

Look around in your imagination one more time. Remember that this is your special place. You will always be able to return here whenever you want to feel calm and safe and happy. Your helper will always be there whenever you want them to be. Prepare to open your eyes and leave your special place for now. Now when you open your eyes, you feel calm and happy.

Active exercises

Some children find it hard to stay still. Here are some exercises which can help create calm and focus.

- Roll or throw a ball to each other. If that is too easy, you can take two balls to play with.
- Play a game where the first person says an animal, then the next person says an animal that begins with the letter that the name of the first animal ended in.
- Colour or draw together.
- Blow a ping-pong ball forward and back with the child.
- Play a game or do a jigsaw together.
- Play or do things you like to do together.



Sleep

When children or young people have been through difficult events, they can have trouble sleeping. Sometimes this is because, in the evening, they have a lot of thoughts and flashbacks of what happened. Sometimes it is because they have nightmares at night, which can lead to fear and nervousness before going to bed. Sometimes they are so tense and stressed that it is hard to relax.

Sleep is important for the body and brain's development. It is not dangerous for children to sleep badly occasionally, but they should not be getting too little sleep over a longer period. This can lead to them feeling even worse, feeling sad or having a lot of negative thoughts.

It is normal for children and young people who have been through difficult events to need extra support and closeness at night. They often want to sleep beside or in the same room as their parent or a safe adult for a while afterwards.

Sometimes a young person might need to take sleep medication when they have trouble sleeping, but there are many other things you can do to improve sleep. Here is a list of things you can try together with your child.

Relaxation

- Try different relaxation techniques with your child and try to find one or several the child likes and which you can use when the child is going to sleep or when the child wakes up during the night.
- The child or young person could listen to relaxing music to unwind before going to bed.

Sleep routines

- Try to ensure the child has a regular daily rhythm, in other words, that the child wakes up and goes to bed at the same time every day.
- Try to ensure the child does not do other things in bed. It's a good idea for bed to only be associated with sleep.
- The child should not sleep during the day and not sleep in for long in the morning.

Food and drink

- You should preferably not let your child eat a heavy meal close to bedtime, but also not let them go to sleep hungry.
- Avoid drinks with sugar or caffeine in them, such as soft drinks, before bedtime.

Physical exercise

- Make sure the child gets regular exercise. Avoid exercising late in the evening. Instead, exercise during the day or a few hours before the child goes to bed. It is good to exercise outside, both to be in daylight and to get fresh air.

Bedroom

- The room where you are going to sleep should be quiet, dark and cool enough.
- Noise can affect sleep quality even if we don't wake up. It is a good idea to try to ensure that it is as quiet as possible.
- Try to have a bed, pillow and duvet that your child likes.
- Avoid having a computer, iPad or mobile phone near the bed.

What can you try to change in order to improve your child's sleep?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Nightmares

It is common to get nightmares when you have been through frightening events. You may dream about the frightening event or about other things that frighten you. Having nightmares is often really tough and can result in you not wanting to fall asleep, because you are scared of it happening. This can cause major difficulties with sleep. You may wake up in the middle of the night and then not want to or be unable to get back to sleep, because you are scared. Nightmares can lead to increased anxiety and stress. The combination of that and poor sleep can result in you often feeling down and having trouble focusing during the day. There is help available to reduce nightmares.

An exercise for reducing nightmares

This is a method for changing the contents of nightmares so that they become less frightening. We will go through this exercise together during the crisis support when both you and your child are present. You will then be able to practise it at home.

Everyone can imagine things, see pictures or fantasise. We often conjure up pictures and images before we fall asleep at night. Sometimes it can feel difficult to actively imagine things, and in that case, it needs to be practiced. To reduce their nightmares, your child should practice imagining positive things.

- Let your child choose a nightmare. If they always have the same nightmare, they can use that one. If they have different nightmares, you can start with one which is a little less scary.
- your child to tell you about the dream. Then you are going to help each other to change the content of the dream to make it less scary. It is important that the child knows that it will become a dream that they want to have. You can either talk through the new dream or you can write it down.
- Now it is time for the child to practice the new dream. Talk through the new dream together every day before the child goes to bed in the evening.
- When the child is ready to deal with the next dream, do the same until they no longer feels that they are suffering as a result of the nightmares
- For younger children, it may be helpful to draw or play a game about a frightening dream. Perhaps you can change how the dream ends or add playful or funny elements.

Emotions

When you experience difficult events, your emotional wellbeing is affected. As an adult, it is common to feel bad when your child has been through hard things – and perhaps which you may have been directly subjected to yourself. Many parents of children who have experienced traumatic events describe feeling guilt and shame, but also anger and sadness. Taking care of your own emotions is important to be able to help your child to cope with theirs.

Why do we have emotions?

Emotions are the body's very own signalling system. They can arise as a reaction to an event or situation, but they can also be triggered by a thought. Emotions can be felt in different strengths and influenced by both our own actions and the reactions of those around us. In turn, emotions affect how we feel in our bodies, for example whether we are tense or relaxed. Emotions provide us with information and create the impulse to act in a certain way. Demonstrating and expressing our emotions is also an important way of communicating to others how we are and what we need.[]

Managing your own difficult emotions

When helping our child deal with difficult emotions, we need to remain reasonably calm. The first step is, therefore, to become aware of what we are feeling ourselves, and what we need in the moment to calm us down. Our own emotions and expressions of emotion influence the emotions of others. This is called emotional contagion. If you yourself are angry, the other person often gets angrier in the same way, you can influence your child by you yourself trying to calm down. Feelings of guilt are common in both parents and children. As a parent you may feel guilty for not having been able to prevent the child's suffering. It is not surprising that we feel guilty and powerless when we as parents were unable to protect our children. But regardless of what has happened in the past, most children and adults can feel better. Getting stuck in thoughts of your own guilt does not help you or your child feel better.

As an adult, you are a role model for your child, so it is important to show compassion for yourself and your child. If you find yourself having heavy feelings of guilt, try to look ahead instead: what can I do now?

When we as parents have done things we regret, we can make amends. You can talk to your child and take responsibility for the things you did which did not turn out well.

Exercise

In which situations do you feel strong emotions?

How do you deal with strong emotions?

Putting emotions into words

Verbalising and talking about emotions improve our ability to manage them. If you talk about emotions, your child will learn that we can talk about how we feel. When your child expresses emotions, you can help them put what you see into words: "were you worried when we talked about that?"; "you look sad - are you?"

Exercise

Describe a situation in which your child had a difficult emotion.

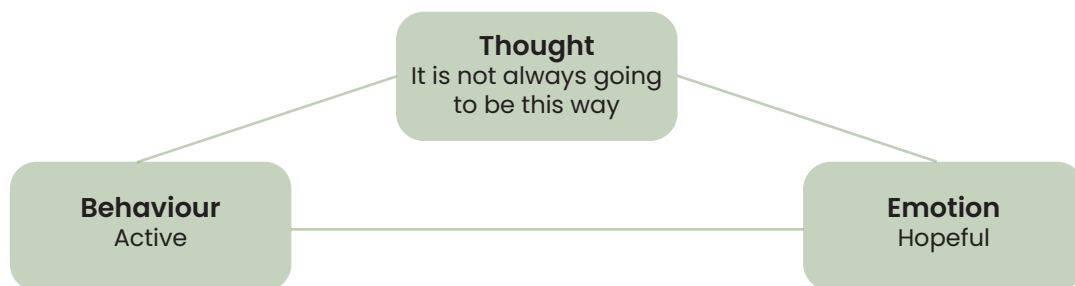
What emotion(s) do you think they felt?

What do you think they were thinking?

What could you do or say that would be helpful to them in that situation?

Emotions are affected by thoughts and behaviour

Emotions affect what we think and do, but our thoughts and behaviours also affect our emotions. You can influence your emotions through your actions but also by becoming more aware of your thoughts, so that they do not fuel the emotions. It is a good idea to be vigilant about whether you are sliding into judgemental thoughts about yourself or others. It is common for parents to get stuck in thoughts like "I should have..." or "if only I had...". These thoughts often strengthen emotions like guilt, shame and anger.



Write an example of your own:



Emotions behind other emotions

Sometimes you show a different emotion on the outside from the one you are feeling inside – you might get angry when in fact you are feeling sad or worried. This is common for both children and adults. When your child shows strong emotions such as, for example, anger on the outside, it can help to consider whether there is another emotion behind the anger. This allows us to react less strongly, and to understand the child's real needs – perhaps to be listened to, to be seen and validated, or to be comforted and supported.

Validation

Validation is a way of calming strong emotions, helping children to manage their feelings and strengthening relationships. Validation means demonstrating in words and actions that what the other person is feeling is understandable and that it is being taken seriously. It is showing an interest in and trying to understand the child's emotions, thoughts and experiences without questioning or judging what the child is expressing.

By being validated, listened to and accepted, the child's feelings can become more manageable. Strong emotions also tend to lessen if you are validated on a regular basis. When you, as an adult, validate children's feelings, it also becomes a way of teaching children to understand, validate and accept their own emotions – even the hard ones. We adults often want to reduce difficult emotions by quickly finding solutions or reassuring the child, but sometimes what helps the most is to acknowledge the child's emotion and listen. After a little while, it may then become easier to do something else to overcome the emotion and eventually solve the problem.

Examples of validation are listening to the child and asking follow-up questions. Another way is to describe in words what the child is showing you: "I see that you are sad." If you think you understand why the child feels the way they do, you can verbalise it: "I know it made you sad when you didn't get to go". You can validate a feeling or experience without agreeing with it: "I know you think it's unfair."

Validation can also be given through actions, such as putting a hand on the child's back, showing the child you see them, giving them a hug or by, for example, fixing them a snack if they are tired and sad. Validation is also something we can demonstrate with our body language and tone of voice.

We can always validate someone's feelings and experiences, even if we do not accept the behaviour that follows it: "I know you are getting really angry." The child may need help to calm down, both by distracting them and, if necessary, calmly preventing the child from harming themselves or others. After a while, when both of you are calm, you can talk about alternatives, for example, what you can both do to stop your child fighting when they get angry.

Invalidation

Invalidation is saying or doing something that conveys that what the other person feels or experiences is not understandable or okay. It could be we ignore or don't listen to the person, or that we walk out of the room. It could also be questioning what the person is expressing, saying for example, "that's nothing to be sad about", or "you can't think that". Profound invalidation can include threatening or abusing a child, such as threatening that the child will not be allowed to live with you anymore, saying that the adult cannot cope with the child, blaming the child or calling the child hurtful names.

We all invalidate others sometimes. It is more likely to happen when we ourselves are stressed, tired, hungry or have our own strong emotions. To reduce the risk of invalidation, it is important to be aware of your own emotions and to find ways to manage them before communicating with your child. Invalidation increases conflict and arguments, reduces the child's ability to manage their own emotions and is detrimental to the relationship.

These situations are hard for me:

This is what I can do to reduce the risk of invalidation:

Increasing positive emotions

When you have a lot of difficult emotions, it may be easier to increase the positive emotions and experiences than to try to remove the difficult emotions. For this, adults play an important role in helping children find positive contexts and experiences. This can include creating good moments in everyday life when you are together and you as an adult are giving your full attention to the child, allowing the child to do activities

with you that they usually enjoy, ensuring the child gets to see people they like, and planning activities for the future to increase their hope for the future. You can think of it as fun and positive moments being plasters for evil.

Secrets

Adults are often very good at talking to children about many things, but they often find it hard to talk to children about sexuality, private body parts, violence and sexual abuse.

There are a lot of things children do not tell an adult or anyone else. It may be something they are thinking about or something that has happened. These may be things that they do not want anyone to know because they feel ashamed or guilty or things they do not tell anyone because they do not want someone else to get hurt. They might be unsure how the adult is going to react if they tell them. They might be worried that the adult will be angry, sad or not believe them.

Children should be taught the difference between good and bad secrets. Good secrets are ones that make us feel happy and give us butterflies. A bad secret is one that makes us sad and worried, gives us a sore tummy and makes us feel weighed down. A good secret might be something like giving a present to someone. A bad secret may be that someone said something horrible or subjected someone to violence or sexual abuse.

Children should be taught they are always allowed to tell others about a bad secret, even if someone has said they are not allowed to tell anyone.

It is common for children not to tell anyone that they have been exposed to violence or sexual abuse. However, if we adults talk to children about their rights and show them that we want them to talk to us, the likelihood of the child disclosing what they have experienced increases.

Adults can demonstrate an openness to talking about bad secrets by including small moments in everyday life when they can talk about, for example, private areas of the body and the rights of the child. For young children, this could be, for example, when changing nappies, changing clothes, when the child is having a bath or before going to meet a friend or relative. Adults can support the child to be in control of their own body, to decide whether they want to be hugged or sit in a relative's arms. It is important for children to have words for all private body parts, so they can talk about what it is, and what feels okay and not okay. With older children, it is important to have a dialogue about the child's rights, what consent is, about sexuality and to show them that you can talk about these subjects if the child wants to. But do not put pressure on the child – if they do not seem interested in talking at the first, try again at another time.

Summary and conclusion

Now we are going to summarise what has helped and what you want to happen in the future.

What has helped me and my child?

What do we need to continue working on?

If something happens to my child in the future, I want to:

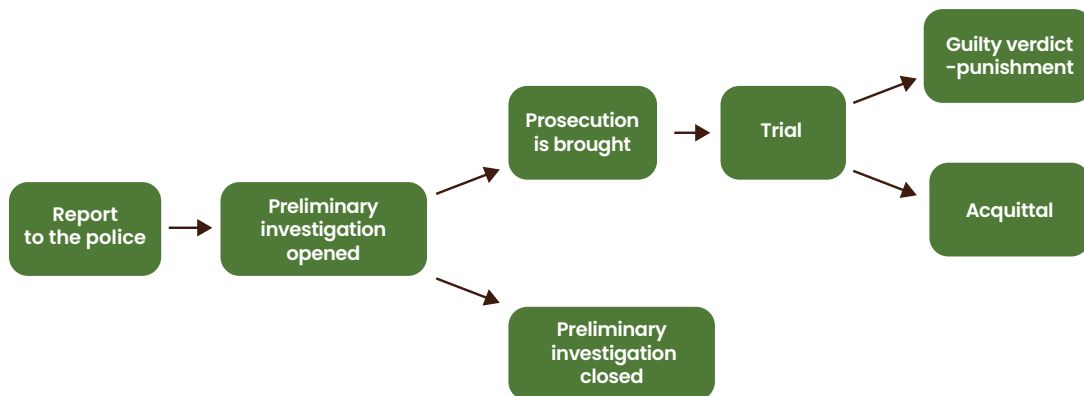
Final meeting with social services

What we will talk about:

- **Crisis support**
- **Assessment**
- **Recommendations**
- **Stressors**
- **Other needs**

Annexes

When a crime is committed – what the legal process looks like



Good words to know

Preliminary investigation

Another word for a police investigation.

Injured party

The person(s) in a court case who was/were the victim(s) of or suffered from the suspected crime.

Defendant

The defendant is the person who is suspected of being guilty and is being prosecuted for the offence.

Public prosecutor

The prosecutor represents the state and is the person who prosecutes the defendant.

Lawyer for the injured party

The victim or injured party has the right to legal assistance. They may be given a lawyer whose job it is to support and help them during the police preliminary investigation and the trial.

Special representative for children

Children under 18 years old can and often need to get help from someone during the trial. The person who helps the child is usually the lawyer

for the injured party. If the legal guardian (usually a parent) is suspected of a crime or if the suspect has a close relationship with the child's parents, the child may be given a special representative instead who can take decisions concerning the child in the legal process in place of the legal guardian.

Presiding judge

The judge who is in charge of the trial.

Defence lawyer

A lawyer who defends a suspect.

Main hearing

Another word for a trial.

Sanction

Another word for punishment.

Trauma-informed care

Trauma-informed care is an approach developed for adults who interact with traumatised children in their daily lives, for example, in short-term foster care and at school. A child's social relationships and context are extremely important for their recovery from difficult events. Trauma-informed care describes how adults can help a child after the child has experienced traumatic events. The care is usually divided into three crucial elements or "pillars":

- Feeling safe physically, emotionally, relationally and culturally.
- Developing positive relationships with adult caregivers, feeling included and connected.
- Developing coping strategies to deal with stress and external pressures.

The first pillar: safety

Physical safety and stability are important for the child to feel better. If you have experienced frightening events, the brain often perceives danger in what are in fact safe situations. A child who has been unsure of their nutritional needs being met may have difficulties managing food and eat too much, so as not to risk going without. Some children may steal things, because they cannot rely on anyone else meeting their needs, and may find it hard to admit they have done wrong for fear of punishment. Children who needed to be prepared for danger may also have developed heightened vigilance and be more likely to perceive others as angry or critical. This can lead to the child getting into more conflicts and arguments. It can take time for the child's brain to retune and adjust to the fact that they do not need to be on alert. Our brains attach great importance to remembering frightening events in order to protect us, and often the child needs lots of safe and positive experiences to feel safe again.

Emotional safety means that responsible adults acknowledge, accept and respect the child's thoughts, feelings and wishes. Children who have experienced stress can be challenging for those around them. It is important to be patient, to see beyond the challenging behaviours and understand the behaviours are linked to negative experiences. Children and young people who are placed in short-term foster care may have trouble feeling safe and cope with this by, for example, keeping their distance, acting out in defiance or, instead, being eager to please and only thinking of the needs of others. Sometimes, receiving care can be perceived as threatening, as it is associated with being let down, with the result that a child may react negatively to expressions of care and warmth.

Children and young people have the right to receive relevant information

about their situation that is tailored to their age and development, and that they have the opportunity to express their views and can influence their own life.

Relational safety requires that the caregivers are stable and safe adults whom the child can trust. To enable the child to develop, we must be honest and open and keep our promises. Children and young people who have been let down in the past can find it hard to trust adults again, and we need to earn their trust. We need to be open with children about what is going on – for example telling them that a short-term foster placement is temporary – so they do not feel let down. Relational safety is also about feeling safe with peers and not being subjected to bullying or abusive behaviour in social settings or online.

Cultural safety means the child's cultural identity is recognised and respected. Adults need to be humble about the child's culture and be aware of their own prejudices. This is especially applicable if a child is placed in a short-term foster home. It may be important to the child to celebrate their holidays and traditions and enjoy the food, music and clothing of their culture. Safety also means being respected for your gender identity and sexual orientation.

A distinction can be made between inner pain and pain-based behaviours. As adults, we can be quick to react to behaviours and forget the inner pain that is causing the behaviour. Sometimes adults' reactions to behaviour may increase the child's inner pain instead of supporting them to express and manage their emotions. In such situations, punishment and control are not conducive to increasing the child's safety and security and supporting the child to cope with painful experiences. A better way forward is usually to validate the child's feelings and what they perceive to be difficult. The way we as adults respond to the child can determine whether a conflict will escalate or if it can be de-escalated. Firstly, we need to be calm enough ourselves to be able to control how we want to handle a difficult situation. As an adult, you may need to work on your own strategies for managing emotions (see the chapter Emotions).

The second pillar: connections

Relationships are a child's basis for survival. Good relationships are crucial for a child's development and health. Children who are not protected and cared for by their parents or the adults who are supposed to look after their needs can quickly develop issues with trust, which can manifest themselves in different ways.

Attachment forms when a caregiver recognises and responds to the child's needs by comforting and helping the child to feel calm and safe. When the pattern of having one's needs met is repeated, a sense of trust and security is created. Not having these experiences can result in the child needing to make sure they get what they need, which can lead to them being perceived as trouble, demanding and clingy.

Some children may develop strategies to please others and not recognise or express their own needs. Other children may be perceived as independent [1] and uninterested in relationships, and rarely show themselves as vulnerable or needy. These different ways of coping with attachment issues can be described as developing different patterns of attachment. Some children may go between wanting to be close to others and trying to reject others. Behind these different behaviours is a need to form good relationships, but the child has developed unclear ways of expressing this. This in itself can make it difficult for those around the child to understand and respond to them, which can result in a downward spiral in which the child's needs are still not being met, and we adults become frustrated and feel inadequate. The good news is that these patterns can change if we adults are persistent in trying to understand the child beyond their behaviours, and if we work persistently to build a relationship by trying to understand, listen, validate, give attention and provide warmth.

The third pillar: coping

Going through difficult experiences and traumas has a major impact on an individual. Trauma symptoms manifest themselves in many ways. The child needs support from safe adults in order to cope with these symptoms, and to manage and regulate their emotions. The basis for this is safe relationships, a validating and affirming approach and finding ways to calm down. With the help of others, the child can develop strategies for managing emotions, relaxing, sleeping better and building relationships in ways that make the child feel good. Some of these strategies are included in this workbook and in the workbook for children.

Homework

Before the next time we see each other, I am/we are going to practice:

When I am/we are going to practice it:

Number of times I/we practiced it:

How did practicing this exercise feel?

How can this exercise help?

Sleep diary

Day /Date	What time did your child fall asleep and when did they wake up?	How many times did your child wake up during the night?	Total number of hours of sleep:	How much did the child sleep during the day?	Comments, e.g. lots of physical activity during the day, sick, etc.
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Information

If you would like to know more about what happened and the work we did when you were in contact with us, you can contact us afterwards.

If you would like to know more what the social services did, you can contact the social services office you were in contact with before or whomever you are in with contact now.

To find out afterwards what happened in a criminal investigation in which you participated, you can contact the police.

Useful websites

Your rights

If you want information about legal rights, what happens in a trial, and the rights of victims of crime, the website [unicef.org/child-rights-convention](https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention) is a good place to look. There you'll find a child-friendly explanation of your rights and how they are protected around the world.

[unicef.org/child-rights-convention](https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention)

Voices of Youth

If you want information about mental health, the body, sex, relationships, self-esteem, and more, you'll find it at [voicesofyouth.org](https://www.voicesofyouth.org), a global platform by UNICEF. The site includes tips and stories from young people around the world, covering things like how to handle stress, body image, identity, and friendships.

[voicesofyouth.org](https://www.voicesofyouth.org)

Child helpline international

Child Helpline International links you to anonymous and free helplines around the world. If you want to talk to someone about anything – from anxiety, bullying, or abuse to problems at home – this is a safe and confidential way to get support. You can search by country and find a number to call or chat anonymously.

[childhelplineinternational.org](https://www.childhelplineinternational.org)

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**Ylva Edling
Kajsa Jung
Thora Magnusdottir
Jonas Viksten
Notta Björk Surlantzis**

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Translator – Janet Cormack

International adaptation – Linda Jonsson and Anette Birgerson, Marie
Cedershölds University, Sweden

Editor – Shawwna von Blixen-Finecke, Barnahus Network

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