

## What can I do?

**Talk with someone you trust**

**Find a mental health provider in your area**

**Call your family organization** — We are parents too! Here are some other ways to take care of yourself:

**Take one thing at a time.** Pick one task and work on it. When that's done, move on to the next.

**Be realistic.** If you're overwhelmed at home or at work, learn to say, "No!"

**Don't try to be superman/superwoman.** No one is perfect, so don't expect perfection from yourself.

**Visualize.** Use your imagination to see how you can manage a stressful situation.

**Meditate.** Five to 10 minutes of quiet reflection can bring some relief. If you're having a stressful day at work, close your door and meditate or go for a quick walk to clear your mind.

**Exercise.** Thirty minutes of physical activity per day helps both body and mind.

**Hobbies.** Take a break and do something you enjoy.

**Adopt a healthy lifestyle.** Get adequate rest, eat right, exercise, limit your use of caffeine and alcohol, and balance work and play.

**Share your feelings.** Don't try to cope alone. Let friends and family provide support.

**Be flexible!** Whether you're at home or at work, arguing only increases stress. If you feel you're right, stand your ground, but do so calmly and rationally.

**Don't be overly critical.** Remember, everyone is unique and has his or her own virtues and shortcomings.

~For more information and resources, visit  
Mental Health America: <http://www.nmha.org>

For More Information:  
Contact G.E.A.R. Parent Network:  
[www.gearparentnetwork.org](http://www.gearparentnetwork.org)



1-800-264-9224

Our toll-free number throughout Maine

For technical assistance and training information about trauma please visit us at [www.thriveinitiative.org](http://www.thriveinitiative.org) or call us at 207-878-5020



---

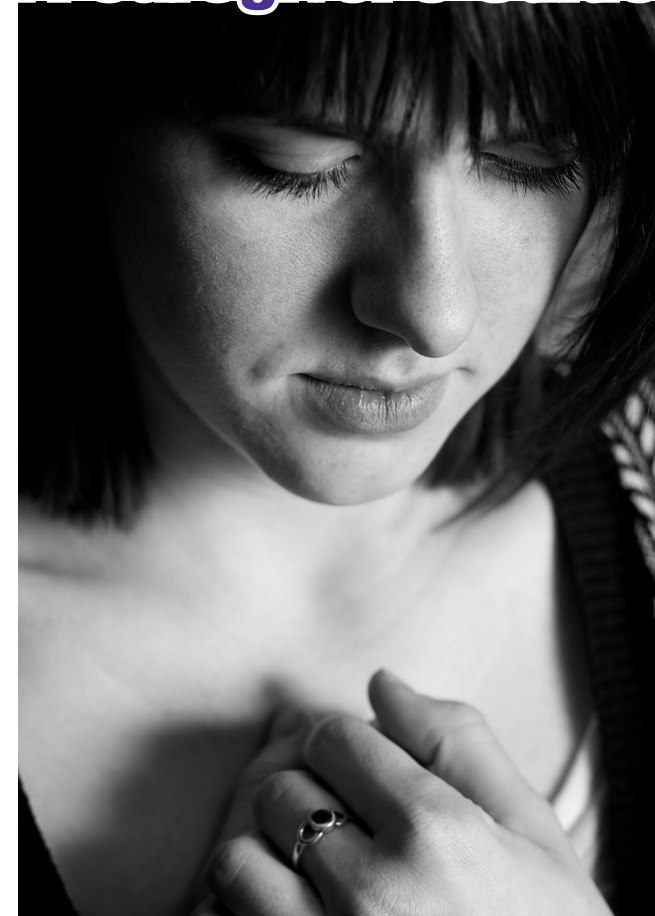
This information is brought to you by  
**G.E.A.R. Parent Network and THRIVE**, an independent nonprofit and Maine's state and federally funded Trauma-informed System of Care technical assistance partner. Funds available from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration in conjunction with the State of Maine's Department of Correction's Division of Juvenile Services.

---



10 Caldwell Road, Augusta, ME 04330  
(207) 626-3448 (voice and TTY)  
STATEWIDE CRISIS NUMBER 1-888-568-1112

## A Caregiver's Guide



What is Trauma and why does it matter to my family's health?

Presented by:



1-800-264-9224  
[gearparentnetwork.org](http://gearparentnetwork.org)



# What is trauma?

**T**rauma is when something really unexpected happens to you and you have a hard time coping with it.

A traumatic experience is outside the range of what is usual or expected, and can cause intense fear, shock, horror, or feelings of helplessness.

## A traumatic event can be private, such as:

- Physical or sexual assault,
- Domestic violence,
- Child abuse or neglect,
- Witnessing interpersonal violence, accidents,
- Life threatening illness,
- Death of a loved one,
- Separation from family due to hospitalization, incarceration, residential placement, foster care, or divorce.

It can also be a public event, such as war, terrorism, community violence, or natural disaster.

## What may happen when you experience traumatic events?

**M**ost people who have experienced traumatic events develop stress reactions. Some of these reactions get better over time, but many people develop ongoing symptoms.

### Physical symptoms may include:

- Headaches,
- Stomach aches,
- Rapid heart beat,
- Problems with sleep and
- Problems with appetite.

### Emotional symptoms may include:

- Depression,
- Anxiety,
- Increased aggression,
- Poor social skills,
- Mood swings and
- Obsessing about the event.

These symptoms can affect you at work and school due to difficulty paying attention and focusing. Sometimes these problems lead to using substances, hurting oneself and eating disorders.

There are many reasons why people choose not to share these experiences. They may feel ashamed, fearful, emotionally numb, or hopeless that anyone could understand their experiences.

## What does this have to do with my family?

**R**aising a child with special needs can be challenging because caregivers are stressed by our own lives as well.

Imagine if you are a caregiver who has experienced trauma. This can be even more challenging for you when your child reacts in ways that you find hurtful that leaves you sad and confused. The way your child copes may seem wrong to you but for them it's how they make sense of the unexpected stuff that has happened to them.

When a child yells, disobeys rules or does something that feels hurtful caregivers often feel powerless. This is especially true if you have been personally impacted by trauma and haven't received help.

You may blame yourself or feel like you want to give up and get angry. This is now a "cycle" and no one wins when we get caught up in a cycle.

We also know that all people have the capacity to get better. We want what is best for our children and we want what is best for ourselves as caregivers and our entire family. Asking for help is the first step.

**Instead of asking "what's wrong with me," start by asking "what happened?"**

You can break the cycle of trauma and offer your children a different way to cope and heal!

