

GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP

In the United States there are systems of mental health and social services for people who have experienced trauma like you and your children. There are therapists who work with children, others who work with adults, and some who work with children and parents together (even infants and toddlers). These services are open to anyone who is having more trouble coping than they can bear, though you may need help to know how to access them.

“Look for the helpers. You can always find people who are helping” – Fred Rogers

We know that you may have been treated unkindly or unfairly government agents at the border. You may have even been treated very badly, which can make things feel even more stressful for you. Fred Rogers, an important American who knew a lot about children, used to say: “Look for the helpers. You can always find people who are helping.” There are many people in the United States who want to help, and if you don’t find them at first, keep looking. They will be there.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

2-1-1 United Way

Calling 211 is a free and confidential way to connect to resources in your area including legal assistance, housing, food, and emergency/crisis intervention

FREEDOM FOR IMMIGRANTS

Provides resources to help you locate loved ones, obtain legal or financial assistance, and much more.

www.freedomforimmigrants.org

Phone: (385)212-4842

WHO WE ARE

This pamphlet was prepared by mental health professionals to help you, your child and your family recover from the forced separation you have been through. It is created to let you know what to expect as a parent, how to understand reactions from your child that may be confusing or difficult, and how to find help as you and your child readjust to being together again.



PSYCHOANALYSIS
DIVISION 39
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
SECTION II



Understanding TRAUMA



What To Expect When You Are Reunited With Your Child

TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

You and your child have been through so much already to get to the US border. Some of the experiences you had in your home country, and some of the experiences you had along the way, were probably extremely frightening, that is, *traumatic*, for you and your child. This trauma would have been compounded many times over by your experiences at the border, especially if you were separated from each other. You have gone through a dangerous journey in order to make a better life for yourself, but especially for your children, and now your children have been taken from you.

HOW CHILDREN REACT TO TRAUMA

Children's reactions to trauma depend on their age, how much they can understand, whether their development was going well before or whether they have special developmental needs, how many trauma experiences they may have already have been through, and how much support they might have had to feel protected and safe again. These reactions can be very confusing to parents. Remember that they are not doing these things to be bad or disrespectful. They are doing them because their minds and bodies are reacting to trauma in ways they can't control or talk about.

Some children may:

-  Have nightmares or trouble sleeping
-  Fear things that remind them of the separation (sights, sounds, foods, faces, uniforms, etc.)
-  Be unusually quiet or withdrawn
-  Startle easily or overreact to things that wouldn't usually bother them.
-  Be moody or cranky or have lots of tantrums. Fear may come out as aggression
-  Cling to you OR push you away, even though they desire to be near you

THE HEALING PROCESS

It can take a long while for children to heal and feel better after traumatic experiences. Loving relationships are the most healing and protective a child can have, so even when you are not sure how to help your child, your love and care can help them.

When you have also experienced trauma, it can be even harder for you as a parent. You might feel angry and irritable, have trouble sleeping, feel depressed or have trouble trusting people. It can be very hard to have patience for your children when you are feeling this way. You need support, just as your child does.

HEALING

Things you can do to help you and your child when you're reunited



Give your child as much love and affection as you and they can handle. If it makes them uncomfortable, be patient, and wait until they are ready



Talk with your child honestly about what is happening in words they can understand. Let them know you are doing everything you can to make sure things will be okay



Let children know it IS NOT THEIR FAULT and that sometimes adults need to cry too. Children often work through difficult feelings in play or art so give them the opportunity to do so if possible



Try to keep to a schedule and routine, even if you are not in a home setting. When children know what is going to happen next, they feel safer and more in control



Help them hold onto good memories of your family, your country and your culture by telling stories, playing games, or singing songs that you have enjoyed in the past



Reach out to other available adults for support, to talk and connect. Rest and take care of your body and mind as much as you can. Religion or spiritual traditions may also be a source of comfort