



„WITH OTHER EYES“

A guidebook for parents of mentally ill children and young people under stress



für köln

Helpful websites and links



→ Caritas Cologne: <https://www.caritas-koeln.de/>



→ For people with a residence permit in Germany Fachdienst Integration und Migration:
fim-beratung@caritas-koeln.de



→ For unaccompanied minor refugees and adults with toleration or residence permit:
fluechtlingsberatung@caritas-koeln.de



→ In psychologically critical situations, therapy centre for people after torture and flight:
therapiezentrum@caritas-koeln.de



→ For families in crisis situations, international family counselling:
ifb-koeln@caritas-koeln.de



→ Counselling centre for parents, young people and children in Porz:
eb-porz@caritas-koeln.de



→ Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians North Rhine: On this page you will find information about doctors and therapists: <https://patienten.kvno.de/praxissuche>



→ Cologne Health Department: <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/service/adressen/00112/index.html>



→ Action New Neighbours: <https://aktion-neue-nachbarn.de/blog-detail/Gesundheitliche-Versorgung-von-Gefluechteten/>



→ Therapy centre for people after torture and flight: Ideas for „calming the soul“ and dealing with fear, worry and loneliness (Arabic, French, Farsi, German)
https://www.caritas-koeln.de/export/sites/ocv/.content/galleries/downloads/Seelenberuhigung-in-Zeiten-von-Corona_Deutsch.pdf

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„WITH OTHER EYES“

A guidebook for refugee parents of emotionally distressed children and young people

Dear Parents!

You and your children have had to leave your homeland. Before and during the flight, you experienced difficult and stressful things that were dangerous for you. Here in Germany, too, many things, such as the language and the culture, are unfamiliar, new and sometimes quite difficult and stressful.

The time before, during and after the escape has influenced and changed you and your children. Your children may sleep and dream badly, be sad more often, have fears or not be able to concentrate well. All this can sometimes create a feeling of helplessness.

You as a family are faced with many tasks and challenges. This can lead to excessive demands. This guidebook is intended to help you to have more confidence and security in yourself again and to feel your strengths.

This can help you to see your children through different eyes. This will help you to understand them better and give you a sense of security that you urgently need to find your way in the new everyday life.

**It is important for us to make you aware of the things that can be influenced:
The relationship with your children and yourself.**

You can read the guidebook in its entirety or pick out the part that you are interested in and where your child needs support. You may recognise many of the points described for your children from yourself. In that case, the ideas offered can also be of help to you. We wish you the courage, strength and curiosity in yourself and your child that they need to be able to face the challenges.

Imprint

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Printed by Cariprint, Caritas Werarbeit,
printed on 100% recycled paper

info@caritas-wertarbeit.de

The guidebook was financially supported by the:

**Diözesan-Caritasverband
für das Erzbistum Köln e. V.**



Stand: May 2022

Trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder

WHAT MENTAL AND PHYSICAL CONSEQUENCES CAN THREATENING AND VERY DISTRESSING EXPERIENCES HAVE?

People who have experienced violence, war, persecution and death may feel significant changes in their thoughts, feelings and actions. In some cases, trauma develops after the stressful experiences.,

TRAUMA CAN DEVELOP AFTER AN EVENT THAT SEVERELY WOUNDS A PERSON'S SOUL AND DEEPLY SHATTERS THEIR EXPERIENCE OF SAFETY AND INTEGRITY

Post-traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD)

Very stressful and threatening experiences can cause physical and psychological reactions. If the stress reactions persist, a trauma sequelae disorder develops, often post-traumatic stress disorder.

The following criteria apply for the diagnosis of PTSD:

- ▶ Those affected were exposed to a traumatic event
- ▶ They are haunted by intrusive memories
- ▶ They avoid everything that could remind them of the traumatic event.
- ▶ They show signs of hyperarousal and tension.
- ▶ Symptoms usually appear within six months after the stressful event.

Younger children sometimes show other symptoms. They want to play the same game over and over again. Others replay the traumatic event (re-enactment), react aggressively, or show regression in development.

Symptoms of PTSD

IMPOSING MEMORIES

People who have experienced trauma suffer not being able to forget the images, sounds or smells that weigh on them. The memories keep popping up unexpectedly and uncontrollably. These memories cause strong feelings and great anxiety. People report nightmares in which they relive the horror. Reminders can also be evoked during the day by harmless stimuli (triggers), such as pictures, scents or sounds, and can be accompanied by strong physical reactions. Many people start sweating, trembling or report palpitations.

AVOIDANCE

Traumatised people try to avoid as much as possible anything that they could remind them of the traumatic events. This can lead to them becoming more and more withdrawn, feeling alone and not talking to anyone about their difficulties.

OVERAROUSAL AND TENSION

Affected people show persistent symptoms of increased mental sensitivity and agitation. Often, they cannot fall asleep, wake up several times during the night, are irritable, become angry at the slightest occasion, cannot concentrate or are very skittish. They are on constant alert to detect dangerous situations at an early stage. This is how they want to prevent similar things from happening again. Over time, they are physically and mentally exhausted (Zeltner and Tschirren, 2018).



Other symptoms, see [Psychoeducation](#), page 20

1 WHEN YOUR NIGHT ENDS SUDDENLY...

Do you know it? A call for your name that is quiet at first and then grows louder. „Am I dreaming or awake?“ Slowly you realise: It is our child who calls out to me. Quickly you go into the children's room and see your child sitting in bed, upset and crying. They have had a bad dream. They realise that it could be another longer, more strenuous night.

Nightmares

A nightmare usually causes your child to wake up. It often remembers exactly what happened in the dream. This makes your child very scared, feel bad and sometimes sad. It often happens in dreams that one fears for the life of people who are important. (Thünker, 2011).

How you can help your child

- To feel again where it is and that it was „only“ a dream. It is important to be there at that moment and to make your child feel safe.
- This can be achieved by first yourself taking a deep breath and then your child. Calm yourself down first, because only then can you support your child.
- Together with your child, you can then, for example, talk about a beautiful memory as precisely as possible, or tell a story about courage, strength and fortitude.





2 FEEDBACK FROM THE SCHOOL...

The teacher says that her child is often unfocused, absent-minded, shows difficulties in learning and often gets into arguments with classmates. Then you might think: „Not again. We don't want to have any problems, we don't want to attract attention. We don't need any additional stress.

Our child should have it better than we do. We just want to have our peace. We are angry at our child, at ourselves, but also at the teachers who don't understand our child“

Strong feelings and learning

The above example describes well that children relive their stressful event from the past through a current stressful situation. Through this „re-experiencing“, the feelings become overwhelmingly strong and the child does not react appropriately in the situation. For example, they become very angry or seem absent and introverted. We therapists call this dissociation. This makes learning difficult and the child often feels bad.

How you can help your child

- It is important to show understanding and appreciation for what has been achieved so far. Try not to be angry with your child. Anger is not a good counsellor.
- As parents, you should cooperate with the school. Do not talk about the child, but with your child. You as parents and teachers are important!
- When the child is absent in thought:
 - ▶ Address them by name.
 - ▶ Touch your child.
 - ▶ Create clear and calm processes.
 - ▶ Create well-planned and announced changes from one situation to another, e.g. from learning to playing, from reading to eating.

3 OUR CHILD COMES HOME...

and the stress of everyday life begins anew. Food doesn't taste good, no desire to do homework, the usual questions about mobile phones, computers or television. Demand and (over-) demand. Perhaps you feel your own worries and that you lack strength. It stresses you out that you can't really be there for your child at the moment. They blame themselves and are ashamed of not being good parents.

Conflicts in the family

When people live together, they come together with their different emotional states and needs. You as a parent may need your rest right now and your children have many experiences to report from school. It is then not always easy to engage with your child. Your child may then sense you being distracted. They may get angry or withdraw and feel misunderstood. They get angry and feel bad. A strenuous cycle is created. This can then lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed.

When you and your child are in this state, strained, irritable and angry, first of all everyone needs time to calm down.

The family is the place where your children and you must learn to pay attention to your feelings, thoughts, and needs. Their task is to provide security and reliability and to set clear boundaries and rules.

How you can help your child

- Take time for yourself and for your child.
- Learn to ask for help.
- Look for positive experiences (this changes the perspective).
- Take turns as parents in parenting (with each other).
- Gain distance in stressful situations and take a break.
- Relax (breathe deeply, count backwards from 10, move around).





TIME
FOR
US

4 FIRST DUTY, NOW PLEASURE...

It sounds so simple and yet it is quite difficult. As a mother and father, you have many tasks, demands and deadlines in your everyday life. You may say to yourself: „I still have to cook and clean, and I also have to fill out the application. It's all so much.“ You are stressed out and everything is spinning. You have had little time for yourself and now you are supposed to spare extra time for your child. You ask yourself how you are supposed to manage this, the child cannot occupy themselves on their own. They are old enough.

Conscious time with your child

Children want time together with their parents. Therefore, it is important to create periods of time in which you consciously pay attention to the child. It is important that your heart and thoughts are completely with your child during these periods. Be careful not to lecture, correct or tell your child they know better. (Graf, 2013)

Everyday family life often means stress. It can help, for example, to plan two fixed appointments a week that are just for you and your child. This creates beautiful moments together, strengthens the bond and creates trust and closeness. Children sense that you have time for them and are interested in them.

How you can help your child

- Tell each other about your dreams, wishes and goals.
- Cook and eat together.
- Read and play together without outside distractions.

5 NOW IT'S TIME TO SLEEP...

Sometimes it can be difficult for your child to switch off. The many impressions, difficult situations at school or perhaps even stress with you or your siblings are a burden. All this has to be processed and we have to come to rest. Especially in the evening, when it gets quiet, sometimes the thoughts and feelings come back particularly strongly, and your child just doesn't want to fall asleep. You need time for yourself so badly.

Sleep and relaxation

To fall asleep easily and sleep through the night promotes concentration at school and allows your child to be more in the here and now. Experiences from the day or the past are often processed during sleep. At evening, it is therefore important to end the day well, to help your child calm down.

How you can help your child

- Regular and deep breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth
- Shared and conscious remembrance of beautiful, positive moments, nice people
- Massage, can be done well together
- Design the children's room as a „safe place“ in terms of furnishings, e.g. hang up a nice picture, warm light
- Create rituals, e.g. reading aloud, talking about the positive things of the day



Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation means information about mental processes and you will receive information here about what might have changed in your child as a result of the traumatic event. This information should help you to better understand your child and their behaviour. This will help you and your child learn to cope with the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. Experts also call these signs **symptoms**.

ANXIETY

Due to the danger experienced, the brain of the child is more alert and reacts much more sensitively, e.g. to sounds and movements. Possibly the child is afraid to lose people they love and to part with them. In technical language we call this „Separation anxiety“. Your child is afraid that something might happen to you.

IMPOSING MEMORIES

When people experience overwhelming situations, these experiences are stored in our memories in images, sounds, sensations, tastes and smells from that time. Later, these memories can put a lot of stress on your children.

AVOIDANCE

Everything that reminds your child of the event such as situations, people, sounds, smells, memories and thoughts, your child attempts to avoid. This can lead to withdrawal from activities that used to be fun. Your child may be passive, withdrawn and often preoccupied. This can occur now or later.

MOURNING

Your child may have experienced the death or loss of family, friends or others. They have also lost their home and school. All of this can make your child feel depressed and withdraw because of the painful memories.

SELF-REPROACH AND GUILT

Your child may also feel ashamed of things they have said, thought, done or not done. This, and the fact that they have lost a lot, can make them feel worthless and lacking in self-confidence.

Signs of stress in children at specific stages of life

If you notice signs of (traumatic) stress in your children, do not hesitate to get help. For example, talk to your paediatrician or family doctor, to the teachers or social workers at school, or find a psychotherapist for children and young people.

0-5

YOUNG CHILDREN

- ▶ Headache, Stomach-ache, tiredness
- ▶ Skittish
- ▶ Difficulty calming down
- ▶ Acts younger than their real age (wetting the bed, thumb sucking, tantrums)
- ▶ Difficulty separating from parents
- ▶ Does not play often

6-12

PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

- ▶ Headache, Stomach-ache, tiredness
- ▶ Appears more anxious and cries more often
- ▶ Spends more time alone at home or at school
- ▶ Gets into fights at home and school
- ▶ Has difficulty paying attention at school, behavioural problems
- ▶ Eats significantly more or less

13-18

ADOLESCENTS

- ▶ Headache, Stomach-ache, tiredness
- ▶ Spends more time alone than with family or friends
- ▶ Does not follow rules
- ▶ Takes drugs and/ or alcohol
- ▶ Runs away from home

Self-care as prevention

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT YOURSELF?

Each and every one of us brings a story of our own. Living together sometimes also means having to live with someone else's stress. This can sometimes be overwhelming and difficult. Everyone has their own limit and a point where it might just be too much.

Precisely because you are good, caring and compassionate parents, you take the pain and feelings of your child. Therefore take care of yourself and protect yourself so that you can better help your child. Treat yourself with respect, dignity, significance and the compassion you deserve.

It is important to recognise one's own needs as a parent and to live them. Children often learn more from what you do and model as parents.

Example self-care plan for parents

- Get into contact and exchange with others, which gives strength, makes hope and new ideas possible.
- Doing and rediscovering things that used to help you become calmer.
- Writing a diary about feelings, thoughts and how to deal with them. This helps to organise the thoughts. Or you write down what you did well as a father / mother today. This helps to develop a positive view of oneself. (Graf, 2013)
- A short walk / exercise in general is good for you.
- Schedule time for the partner.

I TAKE
GOOD CARE
OF MYSELF





WE ARE THERE FOR YOU

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