

Parenting a traumatized child can be a difficult task. Babies and toddlers often can't tell us how they feel. One way they cope with trauma is through behaviors. Learning to see the signs of trauma and respond to them in a positive way helps very young children feel safe and cared for.

Symptom	Explanation
Hypervigilance and Frequent Startling	A baby who is tense, watchful, or on guard even when in a familiar, comfortable, and safe environment is hypervigilant. Often hypervigilance is accompanied by visible startling at sudden noises or sounds.
Attachment and Response to Caregiving	Babies naturally develop attachment relationships with their caregivers. A healthy attachment is one where the child can use the caregiver as a “secure base” and feels safe taking small risks when they are near. Sometimes children are overly clingy with caregivers and sometimes they avoid interaction with caregivers. These are signs of problems in the caregiver-child relationship. 
Trauma Cues and Emotional Distress 	Infants and toddlers remember images, sounds, smells, sensations, and emotions connected with traumatic events. When in a place that looks, sounds, or smells like the place where a trauma occurred, they may respond by getting angry or aggressive, crying, and/or being hard to calm down. Even when trauma cues are not obvious to caregivers, children may show irritability, sadness, anxiety, or excessive fear of being separated from a caregiver.
Feeding Problems	Babies and toddlers who have experienced trauma may have problems with eating, either refusing to eat or wanting a bottle again even though they have begun eating solid food.
Sleep Disturbance, Nightmares	Traumatized babies and toddlers may sometimes be afraid to be left alone in a room or resist falling asleep. Sometimes they may have nightmares or “night terrors.” It’s hard to know if an empty stomach, a wet diaper, or illness caused a baby to start crying in the middle of the night. But if you rarely find a physical reason for the baby to wake screaming, the behavior could be a trauma symptom. 
Repetitive/Constricted Play	 Toddlers normally repeat play behaviors, like stacking blocks, and linking pop-beads. But, when a toddler repeatedly acts out scary or traumatic events, this may be a sign of past trauma. Also, when toddlers show little interest in new toys or in other children, it may be a sign of depression and anxiety.
Developmental Concerns	Traumatized toddlers may show some developmental deficits, including poor verbal skills and/or memory problems.

