

# Supporting Children After Violence

*Beyond the Shelter – Issue 4*

*Insights from Children’s Counsellor, Samantha*

Children who experience or witness violence are often impacted in ways that are not always immediately visible. Trauma and prolonged stress in childhood can disrupt normal development and affect behaviour, physical and mental health, learning, and relationships. Understanding how trauma can show up—and how caregivers can respond—can play an important role in a child’s healing.

## Signs a Child May Be Struggling

According to Children’s Counsellor Samantha, children can react to trauma in many different ways. Some may show physical symptoms such as frequent stomach aches or headaches, trouble sleeping, or changes in bladder control like bedwetting. Others may struggle cognitively, including difficulty focusing, poor memory, or challenges at school.

Behavioural and emotional changes are also common. Caregivers may notice increased aggression or impulsivity, defiance, social withdrawal, emotional outbursts, anxiety, or low mood. For children who have experienced ongoing trauma, their nervous system may remain in a constant state of fight, flight, or freeze, which can make it difficult for them to trust others or feel safe in relationships.

## What Support Can Look Like at Home

Children who have experienced trauma are sometimes labelled as “problem kids” because of the behaviours they display. Samantha emphasizes the importance of looking beyond the behaviour and recognizing the child’s strengths and efforts.

Support can start by increasing positive attention—acknowledging when a child is doing something well, celebrating small successes, and reinforcing positive behaviours. While consequences may still be necessary, they are often more effective when children are also receiving consistent encouragement and praise.

Introducing coping skills is another important part of support. Simple strategies such as deep breathing or grounding exercises can help children learn how to self-regulate when emotions feel overwhelming. Samantha also highlights the importance of caregiver self-care. Taking even a few minutes each day to focus on your own well-being can help you stay calm and patient during high-stress moments, which benefits both you and your child.

## Helping Children Feel Safe Again

Many children who have experienced violence have lived with unpredictability or chaos. Establishing consistent routines can help restore a sense of safety and help children understand what to expect in their daily lives.

Offering choices whenever possible—such as choosing what to wear or what to eat—can also help children regain a sense of control after experiencing situations where they felt powerless. Creating space for children to express their feelings, validating those emotions, and reassuring them that their reactions are normal are all important steps in rebuilding a sense of safety.

## **Reaching Out for Support**

Parenting is challenging, and supporting a child after trauma can make that responsibility feel even heavier. Samantha reminds caregivers that reaching out for professional support is never a sign of weakness—it is a sign of care and commitment to a child's well-being.

If you are concerned about your child, trust that instinct. Organizations like **Agape House** are here to support children and families, and you do not have to navigate this journey alone.