

# Hypervigilance & Intrusive Thoughts

## Why does it happen?

**Intrusive** thoughts are unwanted distressing memories of a scary event that can come back again and again. This may include flashbacks (reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening), nightmares, severe emotional distress or physical reactions.

**Hyper-vigilance** is when a person's body is kicked into high alert after a reminder of a trauma. The body acts as if the danger is real, even if it's not really there. It's usually shows up with intrusive thoughts, a "numbed" emotional state or attempts to avoid triggers.

## What can I do?

**U**nderstand: As the caregiver, remember that there is meaning behind every behavior. Your child is doing his or her best in any given moment. Trauma reminders can be anything from the way a room smells, a particular sound, the lighting or even a certain meal. These triggers can cause sleep difficulties, trouble concentrating, irritability, angry outbursts, anxiety and self-destructive behavior. Watch your child to find out what triggers your child to help prevent this in the future.

**R**outine: For a child who is in a state of arousal, providing consistency and predictability can go a long way. For younger children, you can create a visual schedule so the child knows what the day will look like. For older children, create a family calendar that has the events for the week. Try to make a daily routine and stay consistent. If there needs to be a change, let the child know ahead of time so it's not a surprise.

## **Teach them S.O.S**

**Stop:** Stop and take several long, deep breaths.

**Orient:** Look around and take in your surroundings. Make note of how the body feels (breathing, heartbeat, etc).

**Seek Help:** Use a "stress buster" to help calm down. If needed, call a friend or adult that you trust.

At times, these symptoms can get so difficult that they result in a panic attack or something more serious. Be sure to call 911, mobile crisis (1-877-382-1609) or take the child to the emergency department if there are any concerns about safety, including trouble breathing, concerns for self-harm or harming of others. Working with a doctor, psychologist or counselor can help your child create reasonable and achievable goals for coping after trauma.

