Helping Children Cope Following a Traumatic Event

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Traumatic Events

• Traumatic events can be disturbing to children, who thrive on predictability and security.
• When exposed to traumatic events, whether personally or through the media, children may display fears and anxieties that may seem extreme to adults.
• Usually, these reactions are normal.
How to help - Nurture

- Express love
- Be available
- Give them opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings
- Foster a sense of connection
- Look for signs of anxiety
How to help - Reassure

• Maintain normal routines
• Encourage discussion and expression of feelings
• Talk about safety measures in place
How to help - Teach

• Interpret the event
  – Provide facts - simple and age appropriate
  – Limit exposure to media
  – Continue conversations - be patient with same questions over and over
  – Talk about helpers in the community
How to help - Teach

• Teach coping skills
  – Journaling
  – Drawing
  – Helping activities - volunteering
How to help - Be a role model

• Children are influenced by their parent’s reactions
• Remain calm - focus on children’s needs
• Share your own reactions (in moderation)
How to help - Open dialogue

• Children need someone they trust - to listen, accept their feelings and be there for them

• Don’t worry about knowing exactly the right thing to say

• Silence won’t protect them, it will prevent them from understanding and coping with the situation
Starting the conversation

• Ask your child what they think happened
  – What have you heard about....?  
  – Are there other things that are bothering you right now?
• Help find words to describe feelings
  – ‘angry’, ‘sad’, ‘scared’, ‘worried’
• Let them know it is normal to feel worried or upset
• Provide reassurance - safety
How children show fear/worry

• Physical symptoms - stomach aches / headaches
• Behavioral changes - withdrawal, hyperactivity, increased clingingness
• Tearfulness/Sadness/Helplessness
• Acting Out/Fighting/Irritability
• Regression
• Changes in sleep
Take Care of Yourself Too

- Get enough sleep, eat balanced meals, try to keep a routine
- Seek support from other adults
- Give yourself time to reflect on what has happened
- Identify another caring adult who is able to listen to your children if you are not able
When to contact a professional

• Behaviors persisting beyond 3 weeks
• Trust your gut
Exploring Services

- School Social Worker
- Pediatrician
- Insurance Company
- Employer - EAP
- Johnson County Mental Health Center
  - 913-826-4200
  - 24/7 crisis line 913-268-0156
Questions?

Crisis Line: 913-268-0156

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