

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 clinginess
- 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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