

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN AFTER A CRISIS

Children manifest their anxiety in many ways after a crisis. It is normal for children, like adults, to take a long period of time to adjust and to feel that everything is the same again. Here are some steps parents can take to assist their child make that adjustment.

1. Return to daily routine as soon as possible.

All children, and even adolescents, come to expect and seek comfort from the consistency of home and school patterns. It is important for those patterns to return to normal so that children and teens feel in control of that portion of their lives.

2. Expect changes in behavior such as:
 - a. disturbances of eating, elimination patterns
 - b. disturbance of sleep patterns
 - c. new difficulties in school, school phobia
 - d. inability to concentrate
 - e. need to be constantly comforted
 - f. increase in aggressive behavior, temper tantrums
 - g. increase in fear, anxiety
 - h. regression of developmental stage (e.g., sucking thumb, bedwetting, baby talk)
 - i. tendency to cling
 - j. withdrawal
 - k. dwelling on the event
 - l. need to act out the event through play
 - m. physical disturbances, head and stomach aches
 - n. fear of being left alone

Older children and teens may suppress their feelings and think it is not "ok" to show fear, or they may express fear through anger.

3. Look for false interpretations of the event, such as:
 - a. Child seeing the event as their fault or a punishment for some "unkind" feelings or thoughts.
 - b. Child feeling that they were rejected (this is especially true in a death situation).
4. Parents can help by:
 - a. listening to their child's fears and concerns
 - b. accepting those feelings
 - c. reassuring the child of their love and caring
 - d. providing lots of physical love and closeness
 - e. conveying the expectation that the child is competent and that the child can cope with the stress with the parent's help.
5. If you feel that your child or teen is taking too long to adjust, if behaviors are severe, or if fears worsen, it is time to consult a professional counselor or therapist. **REMEMBER:** Sometimes those individuals who visibly react the least may be the ones that need the most help.
6. Expect reoccurrence of symptoms or renewed grieving on the anniversary date of the crisis and on significant dates throughout the year (for example after a death--birthdays, holidays, etc).