

Responding to Tragedy

In the wake of a tragic event how do we take care of ourselves and our children? Understanding how to cope with the stress and trauma associated with tragic events is required to maintain our own emotional well-being, and that of our children. Below are tips and information on taking care of you and talking to your children about tragedy.

The feelings we experience after a tragedy are neither right nor wrong. Feeling the effects of stress from trauma are normal. Everyone reacts in their own way to violence and trauma; some coping strategies are more effective than others. Below are some important things to remember:

- Stress may be physical, cognitive (thoughts), emotional (feelings) or behavioral.
- Traumatic stress response can occur right away or even weeks after the event.
- Symptoms will normally subside and disappear in time.
- Talking about the trauma is the best medicine. It's important to have someone you trust to listen and support you.
- Accept the fact that life will go on. Maintain or return to a normal routine as soon as possible and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Exercise, rest and eating well-balanced meals are important.

Some of the normal reactions to traumatic events include:

- disturbing images, thoughts, or dreams about the event
- emotional numbness, or "not feeling anything"
- mood swings, irritability, uncontrollable crying
- anxiety, guilt, anger, and/or depression, grief
- difficulty sleeping
- withdrawal from friends and loved ones
- difficulty concentrating at work
- diminished interest in important activities

When Talking With Your Children About Topics Associated with Tragedy

Find out what your child knows already. If your child asks you a difficult question you might simply ask, "What have you heard?" This allows your child to tell you what she understands — or misunderstands — and perhaps what concerns are prompting her question.

- Keep your answers simple. Give answers that are appropriate for your child's age. One simple sentence may be enough. Underneath a child's question, she may be worried about her safety, so offer reassurance. You might describe the different ways she is safe and say, "The policeman is there to protect us," or, "The flight attendant is showing us how to stay safe on the airplane."
- Ask more questions. For example, if your child asks you about people being injured on the news, you might say, "I feel sad those people got hurt. How do you feel?"
- Talk again. Be prepared for children to ask the same question many times. This means they are continuing to think about the issue and may need more information. You might save some information for later discussions

(http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/strategies_10.html)

10 tips when talking with your kids about tough issues

1. Start early.
2. Initiate conversations with your child.
3. Listen to your child.
4. Address any fears.
5. Create an open environment.
6. Communicate your own values.
7. Try to be honest.
8. Be patient.
9. Use everyday opportunities to Talk.
10. Talk about it again-and, again.

The Employee Assistance Program counselors are available to employees and family members who would like assistance in coping with trauma, violence or other concerns related to work or personal stresses. Call the EAP at 800-322-5327.