



GUIDELINES FOR HELPING CHILDREN DURING A TIME OF TRAGEDY

A national tragedy imposes severe strain on everyone in every community, but children comprise a particularly vulnerable group that requires special attention. A child's functioning is often disrupted because of the severe stress that is felt by the adults around them. Though it is probable that the passage of time can help re-establish equilibrium and functioning for many children and families, a few guidelines may be helpful while the tragedy is current.

As soon as possible after the triggering event, parents and caregivers should be encouraged to set aside time to talk with their child. It is important to do this, as the child will be hearing about the event at school, on television, and in the community.

Children should be given information factually and in a simple manner. If children want to know more than you have shared or are confused, they will ask questions.

Use the correct language. Say words that apply- "hi-jacking," "terrorism," "dead".

Be honest about your feelings with the child. Adults are role models for children. It is okay for them to see your sadness and grief, and share in your feelings.

It is okay to let children know you are afraid, but let them know what you are doing, and what the country is doing to make things safe. Get ideas from children regarding what helps them feel safe.

Though you cannot promise that you will always be safe and be there for your child, you can focus on what you are doing together now and the good times you have already had. A tragedy is a good time to begin teaching children that life is not always predictable even when we take every precaution to be safe.

Children should continue to follow their daily routine. Schools provide a sense of regularity and order to the child's day, guiding activities by an ordered schedule in the company of familiar persons. They also play a major role in the process of building the sense of safety and security. Caregivers are given a respite from their care-taking responsibilities while children are at school.

Encourage caretakers to continue taking their children to activities where they participate, feel secure, and are comfortable. Routine is necessary for children to anticipate their future.

Allow children to struggle with their own childhood crises, amidst a tragedy. Their challenges and concerns should not be minimized because of the national situation.

Give children hugs; tell them that you love them; accept their wanting to be with you. Providing reassurance and physical contact will help your child relax and become less fearful.

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