



HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD DURING CRISIS

TALK HONESTLY ABOUT THE MAGNITUDE OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED

- It is essential that children express their feelings, especially during times of crisis. Parents or caregivers should speak to children about the events. Be calm, and open to their questions and feelings.
- Let your child's questions lead the way – answer them as best you can. "I don't know" is an acceptable answer.
- Children may feel as if they are not safe. While the likelihood of events impacting them here are less, discuss how events like this do take place, and that all measures to keep people safe are being taken.
- Be honest about your own feelings about the tragedy. Sharing your feelings gives your children the courage to share theirs.

TAKE A BREAK FROM THE NEWS

- Think about an activity the family can do together instead of watching the news. Create some quiet time before bedtime to be with your children.
- Be patient – children will often revisit the feelings and ask questions again and again.
- After a tragedy of this magnitude, children will need to share stories, fears, and grief. It is normal for children to be repetitive with their questions. Be open to talking to your child and addressing their questions and concerns as they come up.
- Ask them about their dreams and encourage them to discuss their thoughts and feelings.

RECOGNIZE THAT A CRISIS OFTEN MANIFESTS ITSELF THROUGH BEHAVIOR

- Normal behaviors include aggression, fatigue, destructive behavior, reversion to an earlier developmental stage, lack of appetite, insomnia, among others. It is important to talk to your child and be patient with these feelings.
- Arrange some physical methods for children to express their feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety. Some activities such as clay, painting, ripping old phone books, creating a collage, and using blocks are outlets that help children to get their feelings out in the open.

GET SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILDREN

- Reach out to others in your community to build a base of support.
- Access any spiritual resources your family may participate in.
- Keep in touch with your child's school – find out how they are responding to the crisis.
- Give lots of extra love and hugs to children during these times.

Our thanks to the Center for Grieving Children for this article.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO HELP YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN

The Dougy Center (www.dougy.org)

American Psychological Association
www.apa.org

National Association of School Psychologists
www.nasponline.org

National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
www.ncptsd.org/facts/specific/fs_children.html