



After a Traumatic Event: What to do for your children

Parents try their best to protect their children from tragic situations. However, sometimes frightening and overwhelming events invade a child's world. Suddenly their vision of a safe and predictable world is abruptly shattered. Ask your child what they think, know, feel, or fear before offering guidance. The following information is meant to be a guide in talking with your children, but if intense fears persist, please seek professional guidance.

- **Take care of your needs.** You have experienced the same event, so take care of your emotional needs first. To feel safe your child needs to sense that you can cope with the event as well.
- **Be available.** Make time to talk. Be sure they know they can come to you when they have questions. Listen carefully to their concerns as they recount their version of the event, including their fears and feelings. This brings them a sense that you understand their thoughts so they will feel safe to talk more.
- **Reassure them.** Let them know that their feelings of fear or anger are a natural reaction to a traumatic event. Rebuild self-confidence by finding ways to praise your child for their actions, for talking with you, for sharing their feelings, for wanting to help, and/or expressing concern for others.
- **Be honest.** Give them information that is truthful and appropriate for their age and maturity level. Too much detail can be especially scary. They mostly want to know that everyone will be safe and "okay."
- **Be calm.** Children will react to both what you say and how you say it. Even if you're feeling tense, try to speak with them as calmly as possible. This will set the tone for ongoing conversations.
- **Include your child** in future safety precautions to help them feel safe and secure. This could include making sure the house is locked or where to meet in case there is a frightening event and you are separated from each other.
- **Maintain routines,** particularly around meals, bedtimes, and scheduled social and leisure activities. Structure helps a child feel safe. Make time for soothing activities such as reading with them or playing board games.
- **Be patient.** Give your children, your family, and other loved ones signs of reassurance such as hugs and affection. Recovering from tragedy is a process. With time and with support, children will eventually heal. Talk to them daily and affirm you are there to listen and provide ongoing support.

If you or someone you love is feeling overwhelmed and stress is interfering with everyday life, reach out to Concern. Consulting with a counselor may be beneficial.

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