

Resources for Helping Children Deal With Stress and Trauma

Events such as the recent attack made on our country can cause varying degrees of stress and trauma for many individuals. The impact upon children and adolescents can often be especially profound since they have not yet fully developed coping mechanisms to deal with such events.

After being involved in an intense, unusual, or abnormal event, a child or adolescent may experience reactions that are out of the ordinary for them. The event may create a stress response, which can result in changes in the individual's usual physical or emotional reactions. Although these reactions are often unfamiliar and frightening to the child or adolescent, they are frequently normal. Often these reactions appear immediately after the event, but they may appear hours, weeks, or months later.

This pamphlet is designed as an informational resource tool to assist children and adolescents that may be experiencing either stress or trauma from recent events. The information contained in this pamphlet is not exhaustive, but is designed to provide you basic, fundamental information that you can utilize with in assisting children and adolescents in coping with the stress and trauma related to recent events.

For additional information on stress and trauma, or to obtain information about the counseling resources we can offer your child or adolescent, feel free to contact us at (303) 593-0575.

You can also obtain additional information or contact us online on our website at www.DrTrathen.com.

Normal Crisis Reactions and Symptoms

Children or adolescents involved in an intense or abnormal event may experience reactions that are perceived as out of the ordinary for them. Such reactions are often unfamiliar and frightening for child. They are frequently disconcerting for the parent. It is important to realize that these reactions are normal. Some of the more common reactions after a critical incident include:

1. Suicidal hints (survivor's guilt, "Why were they killed and my life spared?").
2. Psychosomatic problems (increase in reports of headaches, stomachaches, other physical symptoms).
3. Difficulties with school work (concentrating, going to school).
4. Nightmares or sleep disorders (can't get to sleep, need a night light on).
5. Changes in eating patterns (loss of appetite).
6. Temporary regression with otherwise normal behavior (bed-wetting, wanting to sleep in the same bedroom as parents or siblings, clingy or needy behavior, regressed language).

This is not an inclusive list. Some children or adolescents exposed to the same event may not suffer any effects at all and this, too, is a normal reaction. While these reactions can be alarming and unsettling, it is important to remember that they are not losing your mind or "falling apart."

If your child or adolescent are experiencing painful thoughts, memories, or feelings during this period, we would like you to contact us at:

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Parker, Colorado 80134
(303) 593-0575
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Helping Children and Adolescents Cope With Grief and Trauma



Resources to Help Your Child or Adolescent Deal with the Effects Of Grief and Trauma

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Potential Acute Stress Reactions to any Traumatic Event

There are a variety of reactions that a child or adolescent may experience that are related to traumatic events. Situations or circumstances that cause trauma generally involve the experiencing, witnessing or being confronted with an outside event that involved an actual or life-threatening situation, or experiencing a threat to one's person or life-threatening harm to others.

Some of the common responses of an individual to trauma are as follows:

1. The person's emotional response is one of intense fear, helplessness or horror.
2. Either while experiencing or after experiencing the distressing event the individual has several of the following symptoms:
 - a) Feeling numb, detached, or the absence of any emotional response.
 - b) Feeling like being in a "daze".
 - c) A feeling of being detached from one's environment.
 - d) Feelings of unreality or strangeness concerning a person's environment, themselves, or both.
3. The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in a least one of the following ways:
 - a) Recurrent images and thoughts.
 - b) Recurring dreams and illusions.
 - c) Flashback episodes (reliving the experience).
 - d) Distress on being exposed to things that remind one of the traumatic event.
4. Avoidance of situations that recall the trauma (thoughts, feelings, conversations, activities, places and people).
5. Symptoms of increased anxiety and energy (difficulty sleeping, irritability, poor concentration, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, restlessness).
6. This disturbance causes significant distress or impairment in school other important areas of functioning and may lead to isolation behaviors.
7. These reactions can last up to four weeks following the traumatic event.

Encouraging Your Child to Deal with Grief and Trauma

1. Specifically give your child permission to mourn.
2. Be there personally for the child. Provide affections and security, and also show support, concern, and acceptance by appropriately physically touching the child.
3. Look for ways to help your child express his/her feelings both verbally and non-verbally.
4. Observe for your child's causal connection if personal wishes or actions to the death of his/her loved one. Discouraging "magical thinking" that had any significant cause or responsibility for the death.
5. Keep in perspective the developmental capacities of the child and age related concerns at the time of death.
6. Depending on the age, your child's ability to remember a loved one who is physically gone may be limited.
7. Be aware that your child will often need continual explanation of and communication about the death over an extended time.
8. Recognize that your child is expressing feelings not only about the actual death itself, but also about the changes in the parent and the family following the death.
9. Do not compare your child's grief fully in comparison with yours as a parent or adult.
10. Observe your child's behavior for indications of how he/she is coping.
11. Educate your child that loss and death is likely to bring about intense feelings that are important to deal with and that you'll be there to help him/her through this.
12. Any changes in family responsibilities need to be appropriate for your child to handle.
13. Encourage your child to have patience with himself/herself and others.
14. Encourage your child to talk with his/her friends.
15. Recognize that your child will also likely need some time alone for healing.
16. Structure your child's grief into steps and periods so the child is less likely to become overwhelmed by grief.
17. Notice if your child is using avoidance or defenses too long related to the loss.

Ways You Can Help Your Child Deal with Grief and Trauma

1. Describing the incident and their activities, including what they did, heard, saw, and smelled, etc. What was the first thought they remembered when hearing or seeing it on television? What mental pictures about the tragedy do they remember most? What feelings did they first experience? What are they feeling now? What are they worried or afraid of the most?
2. Creative writing. Have them journal their feelings or write down all their feelings.
3. Creative Art. Have them draw, paint, or do a collage on the tragedy and how they think it will all end. What can positively come about from their tragedy?
4. Write music about the tragedy.
5. Make commemorative memorials. Visit and bring memorial to the local office of a company who lost employees in New York.

Ways Parents Interfere With A Child's Grief and Trauma

1. The parents' own inability to grieve.
2. The parents' inability to tolerate the pain of the child and to allow him to mourn (such as denying the child's feelings and expression).
3. The child's fear of the parents' vulnerability and the desire to protect the parent.
4. The child's concern for his own security, which can take away time and energy to do his own grieving.
5. The lack of security of a stable caring environment.
6. The lack of a caring and emotionally stable adult who can support the grief.
7. The child's confusion about death and any part the child believes they are involved.
8. Unchallenged "magical" thinking.
9. Lack of opportunities for the child to share his longings, feelings, and memories.
11. Instability of family life after the loss.
12. Any other significant losses occurring simultaneously with this loss.

This information is presented for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for informed medical advice or training. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a mental health problem without consulting a qualified health or mental health care provider.