

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH AND HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH COPE AFTER A DISASTER OR TRAUMATIC EVENT: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, AND TEACHERS

JULY 2016 RESOURCE SHARING

When children experience a trauma, watch it on TV, or overhear others discussing it, they can feel scared, confused, or anxious. Young people react to trauma differently than adults. Some may react right away; others may show signs that they are having a difficult time much later. The following tips can help your child after a traumatic event.

How Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers Can Support Children's Recovery

The good news is that children and youth are usually quite resilient. Most of the time they get back to feeling okay soon after a trauma. With the right support from the adults around them, they can thrive and recover. The most important ways to help are to make sure children feel connected, cared about, and loved.

- Parents, teachers, and other caregivers can help children express their emotions through conversation, writing, drawing, and singing. Most children want to talk about a trauma, so let them. Accept their feelings and tell them it is okay to feel sad, upset, or stressed. Crying is often a way to relieve stress and grief. ***Pay attention and be a good listener.***
- Adults can ask the teens and youth they are caring for what they know about the event. What are they hearing in school or seeing on TV? Try to watch news coverage on TV or the internet with them. And, limit access so they have time away from reminders about the trauma. Don't let talking about the trauma take over the family or classroom discussion for long periods of time. ***Allow them to ask questions.***
- Adults can help children and youth see the good that can come out of a trauma. Heroic actions, families and friends who help, and support from people in the community are examples. Children may better cope with a trauma or disaster by helping others. They can write caring letters to those who have been hurt or have lost their homes; they can send thank you notes to people who helped. ***Encourage these kinds of activities.***
- If human violence or error caused an event, be careful not to blame a cultural, racial, or ethnic group, or persons with psychiatric disabilities. This may be a good opportunity to talk with children about discrimination and diversity. ***Let children know that they are not to blame when bad things happen.***
- It's okay for children and youth to see adults sad or crying, but try not to show intense emotions. Screaming and hitting or kicking furniture or walls can be scary for children. ***Violence can further frighten children or lead to more trauma.***
- Adults can show children and youth how to take care of themselves. If you are in good physical and emotional health, you are more likely to be readily available to support the children you care about. ***Model self-care, set routines, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, exercise, and take deep breaths to handle stress.***

To download the entire tip sheet and for more information please visit: <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA12-4732/SMA12-4732.pdf>