

## **CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM SUPPORT FOR PARENTS**

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS WHEN RESPONDING TO A CRISIS**

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If your child is involved in or affected by a tragedy or other type of crisis, there are some general guidelines or suggestions that may help you to better understand and respond to the situation. Remember, you know your child best; therefore you will be most aware of their individual needs, behaviors, feelings and perceptions.

- A crisis is generally viewed as a temporary state of emotional upset or disorganization. It's characterized by a person's inability to cope with a particular event or situation using his customary coping strategies and problem solving skills. The impact on an individual depends on the event or situation and on how that person perceives it in relation to his life. Crises may offer the opportunity for significant learning and growth if resolved and integrated into a person's life and functioning, as well as for negative consequences.
- Make yourself available and accessible to your child if and when he wants to talk. Be flexible and responsive to his needs.
- Try to maintain as much of a routine and sense of "normalcy" as you can, but be tolerant of temporary changes, upset, and needs. Do not be too demanding or structured.
- Communicate/demonstrate your concern, care, support, understanding, and acceptance. Do not be judgmental or use words like "should" or "must" with respect to their feelings and behaviors.
- By expressing yourself openly and honestly and displaying your confidence (i.e., that things will improve and that life will go on) and coping ability, you can serve as an important role model for your child and increase the likelihood that he will adopt similar behaviors and attitudes.

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- Listen to your child when he wants to talk and try to communicate that you understand and accept what he has to say. If he does not want to talk, do not force discussion, but let him know that you are willing to listen whenever the need or desire does arise. Do not assume that your child is not reacting or will not react simply because you do not observe an initial reaction.
- Do not try to “rescue” your child or force him to feel better. Be patient and allow him to recover at his own pace and in his own way.
- Do not try to protect or isolate your child from “threatening” topics or issues, especially those that he is trying or needing to deal with in order to work through and learn from the crisis.

## **Suggested Guidelines Concerning Children and Grief**

By Peter Horsley, Deerfield Counselor

1. When describing the death of someone to a child, **use simple and direct language.**
2. **Be honest. Express you own feelings regarding the death.** By doing so, children have a model for expressing their own feelings. It's all right to cry, too.
3. **Allow children to express a full range of feelings.** Anger, guilt, despair and protest are natural reactions to the death of someone loved.
4. **An important rule when dealing with feelings is: Be permissive with feelings and strict with behavior.** We are entitled to any feeling as long as we express it in a respectful and considerate manner.
5. **Listen to children; don't just talk to them.**
6. No one procedure or formula will fit all children, either at the time of death or during the months that follow. **Be patient, flexible and adjust to individual needs.**
7. **Adults must recognize their own personal feelings about death.** Until they consciously explore their own concerns, doubts, and fears about death, it will be difficult to support children when someone loved dies.
8. **Be an observer.** See how each child is behaving. Don't rush in with explanations. Usually, it's more helpful to ask exploring questions than to give quick answers.
9. **Often grieving children don't talk about their feelings. Instead, they act them out.**
  - For example, the child may act mopey and lethargic but may not have the words to pinpoint how he's feeling or why, specifically, he's feeling that way. This may be a good time to visit with a counselor.
10. **Be prepared for "griefbursts."**
  - Sometimes sudden, unexpected and strong waves of sadness will overtake the child. These "griefbursts" can happen even long after the event of the death.
  - Griefbursts are normal but can be very scary and disheartening for the child. "But I was having fun and feeling so much better!" he might think to himself.
  - Encourage him to talk to a grown-up when a griefburst bursts in. Maybe you can sit with him quietly until it passes.

## NORMAL REACTIONS TO SEVERE STRESS

Everyone responds to severe stress, even though not everyone responds in exactly the same way. Following are some of the normal responses that people have to abnormally stressful events. These reactions may occur during the event, immediately after the event, or sometimes even after a considerable period of time has passed.

### Physical

Tightness in chest or throat  
Trembling or twitching  
Headaches  
Rapid heart beat  
Dizziness  
Faint  
Weakness in muscles  
Sweating  
Lack of energy/fatigue  
Chills  
Dry mouth/thirsty  
Vomit or upset stomach  
Difficulty breathing  
Sighing  
Startled Reactions

### Behavioral

Sleep disturbances  
Appetite more or less  
Talk more or less  
Absentmindedness  
Suspiciousness  
Social withdrawal  
Dreams/nightmares  
Use substances  
Avoidance of reminders  
Change in sexual functioning  
Restless over activity  
Unmotivated  
Crying  
Clinging to reminders of the past  
Children: misc. regressive behaviors

### Emotional

Shock/numbness  
Sadness/Depression  
Anger  
Irritable  
Guilt/self reproach  
Anxiety/fearfulness  
Loneliness  
Overwhelmed  
Helplessness  
Sense of loss of emotional control  
Emotional outbursts  
Helpless/powerless

### Cognitive

Disbelief/Denial  
Poor concentration  
Confusion  
Difficulty with decisions  
Pre-occupation  
Memory problems  
Hyper vigilant  
Nightmares  
Intrusive images/memories  
Disorientation to time, person, place  
Can't get person/event out of mind  
Blame self/others