

Trauma Response Services

610 Valley Health Plaza, Paramus, NJ 07456
24 Hour Emergency Hotline:
1-888-327-2637

Helping Children Cope with the Aftermath of Trauma

Specific things you can do to lessen difficult or stressful situations:

- Following trauma exposure, discussion is very important for children. Listen to children, but don't force them to share information; let it come naturally. Be supportive and empathic. Don't try to make it okay; let them express fears, thoughts and concerns. Children and youth are exposed to events as soon as they watch television or interact with others. Avoiding discussion does not protect children from pain or harm. It could send a message that the subject is taboo or shameful.
- Provide honest information about the trauma and/or death based on the child's maturity level. Always be truthful and avoid using statements that may be confusing. Tell the child the person has died rather than saying they "went to sleep" or "went away". Younger children may wonder when the person is coming back and can be hurt if they believe the person left without saying goodbye. Validate a child's thoughtful questions. When a child believes that someone "went to sleep" they may believe they will eventually wake up. Or, they may begin to have problems sleeping and fear that if they fall sleep, they will not awaken.
- It is okay to let him know you do not have all of the answers. Never lie to a child about what has occurred. Eventually they will find out the truth and this can cause anger or resentment. Provide simple, concrete information in a way they will understand. Be prepared for children to ask the same questions again and again. When this happens, it means they do not understand your original explanation. Be patient, and try again using language appropriate for their age and developmental stage.
- Keep all promises made to children during the crisis. It is important children be able to rely on their caregivers, even in the midst of a chaotic situation. Sharing of information and togetherness may be very healing for children. Silence may make a child feel isolated and lead them to believe they are the only ones struggling with the trauma. If a child feels afraid, angry or frustrated, it may be helpful for them to know that others are also upset or sad. Be careful not to overwhelm them with too much information or expect them to provide you with answers.
- Very young children may not be able to verbally express their feelings and emotions. They may express them through play-acting or drawing. Talk with them and help them name what they are expressing. Children grieve at their own pace. Respect where they are in that process. Older children may be drawn together in situations of tragedy and may also draw strength and support from each other. Allow children reasonable privacy, both physically and emotionally, to deal with their reactions. Death means different things to children depending upon their age. Young children (ages 1-5) grieve for the threat to their security. Children aged six and older grieve more for the actual loss.

When traumatic events occur, children may be afraid that the same will happen to them or someone they love. It is important to let them know that they are not at risk—only if they are not actually at risk. Children who know their parents, caregivers and teachers are working to make a difference feel hopeful. They feel safer and more positive about the future. Children are hesitant to ask openly for formal counseling. If they indicate in any way they want help or counseling, get it for them immediately.

**For Additional Assistance, Contact Trauma Response Services at Care Plus NJ directly:
24 hour Emergency Hotline: 888-327-2637**

Common Reactions of Children to Traumatic Exposure

- Concern for personal safety and safety of others (more attached to parents or teachers).
- Elevated levels of distress; excessive crying, extreme sadness, irritability
- Increased somatic complaints (headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains).
- Decline in school performance or lack of interest in enjoyable activities and/or time with friends.
- Recreating the event (talking repeatedly about the incident, “playing out” the event).
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (sirens, planes, thunder, backfires and loud noises).
- Statements and questions about death and dying.
- Behavioral Changes:
 - Increased or decreased activity level due possibly to anxiety or depression
 - Decreased concentration and/or lack of attention
 - Withdrawal/Isolation or angry outbursts/aggression toward family, peers or authority figures
 - Regression to prior developmental stage
 - Increased negative behaviors (defiance) or emotions (anger, fury)
 - Changes in sleeping patterns (insomnia, nightmares, night terrors) or changes in appetite

Helping School Age Children after Trauma

- Avoid exposing your child to constant reminders of the trauma. Limit exposure to news and media programs regarding the incident. If your child views information on television, keep it brief, watch it with your them and discuss afterwards to clarify miscommunication. Children may not be aware that they are watching repetitions of the same event and may believe the event is occurring repeatedly. Children often listen to adult conversations. Protecting them from re-exposure includes limiting conversations about the incident when they are present.
- Maintain regular family routines, especially around sleeping patterns, eating and extracurricular activities. Young children may want to be tucked in or want a night light. Avoid any unnecessary separations from or changes of important caregivers.
- Children often regress to earlier behaviors (baby talk, bedwetting) after a traumatic incident. In time and with support it is likely they will return to age appropriate behaviors. Participate in soothing activities with your child such as reading books, listening to music, taking a walk and riding bikes. This helps to provide them with safety and security.
- During traumatic events, patience levels can be strained. Be tolerant with your child and with yourself. Give your family time to cope. Emphasize love and support to your children. Address acting-out behavior, of Middle School age children, involving aggression or self-destructive activities quickly and firmly with limit setting.

For Emergencies Please Call our 24 Hour Hotline to Request TRT Services.

For Program Information or Consultations Please Contact:

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