

Tips on helping children and teens cope with crisis

Suggestions to handle children's reactions

Children's reactions are normal responses to abnormal events. These reactions cannot be prevented, but their negative impact on learning, behavior, personality, and emotional development can be minimized when help is provided as soon as possible.

Things to Do:

- Give frequent attention.
- Remain calm and be reassuring, comforting.
- Create a secure and predictable environment (keep routines and be reliable).
- Turn off the TV regarding the event, unless you are present to discuss with child.
- Encourage use of art, drama, play and storytelling as tools to encourage the expression of their fears.
- Plan calming and comforting pre-bed-time activities.
- Allow short-term changes such as allowing the child to sleep with their door open or a light on.
- Encourage participation in school/community activities regarding the response to the disaster.
- Help your child learn how to comfort him or herself such as eating healthy meals, reading, etc.

Communication:

- Listen to child and accept their feelings and fears (encourage child to talk and ask questions).
- Share your feelings.
- Be honest about situation and give simple, correct information.
- Be prepared to counsel and console children.
- Delayed reactions may occur.
- Communicate with your child frequently.

Common ways youths respond to crisis

For some students, tragedy may trigger feelings, thoughts, and memories of their own personal problems. Children can be traumatized and experience reactions similar to adults.

Understanding how a child or young adult is feeling is crucial to helping him or her through a crisis. Below are common ways children and teens react to crisis:

Emotional

- Disbelief, Overwhelmed, Numbness
- Anxiety
- Fearfulness, Clinging to Parents
- Guilt, Inner conflict
- Anger, Depression
- Hopelessness, Helplessness

Physical

- Eating, Sleeping Disturbances
- Night Terrors
- Headaches, Diarrhea, Fatigue, etc.
- Regressive Behavior (ex., thumb-sucking bedwetting)

Intellectual

- Difficulty Concentrating, Easily Distracted
- Confusion, Disoriented, Speech Difficulties
- Pessimistic View of Life, Powerlessness
- Forgetfulness

Social / Behavioral

- Aggression, Fighting
- Withdrawn
- Clingy, Fearful
- Becoming Hyper-Vigilant, Easily Startled

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For further information, please call 281-CARE (513-281-2273).