

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Helping Your Child Cope with Public Tragedy

It is unfortunate that public tragedies have become commonplace in our society today. From school shootings, to an increase in natural disasters it feels as though there is a new crisis in our nation every week. While these events can be difficult to hear about for the common adult or child, they can be even more upsetting to a child in foster care who has experienced significant trauma already. How you and your child's teacher help your child respond to crises is very important. This newsletter will cover common reactions to traumatic events, what you and your child's teacher can do to help your child work through any negative feelings or re-traumatization, and how you can limit media exposure.



Common Reactions Post-Tragedy

The following is a list of common reactions at every developmental stage a child may exhibit following a traumatic event. Keep in mind your child may not show all or any of these symptoms, but may be experiencing some traumatization. Check in with your child frequently to make sure he/she is doing ok, and offer to listen if they want to talk. Be aware of any changes in mood, habits, or appetite following a public tragedy. Seek out a therapist immediately if you feel your child is displaying any trauma symptoms.

Young children may:

- Be easily alarmed or startled;
- Show insecurity or fear over things that used to not be a big deal, or when they are being separated from you (i.e., going to school);
- Be startled by certain noises, phrases, places, or images;
- Show an increase in nightmares;
- Exhibit aggressive behaviors or passive behaviors.

School-age children may:

- Develop intense or new fears;
- Exhibit a disruption in their sleep patterns and/or have an increase in nightmares;
- Have trouble concentrating in school or at home;
- Avoid or decline to participate in favorite activities;
- Exhibit aggressive behaviors;
- Show more withdrawn behaviors.

Adolescents may:

- Exhibit a disruption in their sleep patterns and/or have an increase in nightmares;
- Have feelings of guilt;
- Believe they are a "failure" at protecting their friends, family and community;
- Exhibit reckless behaviors that endanger themselves and/or others;
- Turn to substances (alcohol, drugs) to cope;
- Avoid or decline to participate in favorite activities;
- Exhibit aggressive behaviors;
- Show more withdrawn behaviors.



How to Help Your Child Post-Tragedy

- Keep a close eye on your children following a tragedy. Watch for any irregularities in mood, appetite, personality, or sleep patterns.
- Maintain a close proximity to your children when you are together. This may be especially helpful for younger children who may need extra hugs or attention.
- Let your child know you are available to talk if they have any questions or concerns. Answer your child's questions as honestly as possible, keeping in mind their developmental stage. Your child may be hearing a lot of different stories, so it is important to correct any misperceptions or misinformation.
- Reiterate to your children that you love them.
- Limit media exposure as much as possible. Share stories of heroism or triumph.
- Maintain a "normal" routine as much as possible. Research has shown children cope better following a tragedy if they can return to their normal daily lives as quickly as possible.
- Reach out to community resources: school, therapists, spiritual advisors.
- Anticipate that your child may regress in their behaviors. Review self-regulation strategies and how to express feelings in a way that does not harm themselves, others or property.
- Depending on your child's age, present to them ways to help the victims of the tragedy by volunteering their time, donating supplies, or participating in vigils.
- Following a person-inflicted tragedy, talk to your child about the importance of tolerance, cultural diversity, empathy, and solving conflicts non-violently.



Dealing with Media Exposure

It is almost impossible to escape the media in today's world. Between social media sites, news alert apps, television, radio, and community gossip information can travel even faster than before. News media especially seems fixated on re-hashing and repeating information over and over. Limiting your child's exposure to the media following a local or national tragedy may be difficult, but it will be in your child's best interest. Children who are already sensitive to trauma will have a harder time coping with their feelings following a tragedy. Being exposed or re-exposed to the tragedy over and over can be traumatizing or re-traumatizing to your child. The following are some suggestions for limiting your child's media exposure following a public tragedy:

- Limit all media coverage. Take a break from watching the news for a few days and remove instant news alerts from your phone.
- Monitor your child's Internet use. If possible, have them stay off social media sites for a little while following a tragedy.
- Keep your children busy and participating in activities they enjoy.
- If your family has been personally affected by a tragedy, request the media respect your privacy.

It is important, however, to talk to your child about the events that just transpired. Pretending as though nothing has happened will not allow your child to process the event and move forward; instead, it may make things worse. Keep an open line of communication between you and your child, and answer their questions as best as you can. Limiting their exposure to media is beneficial in helping them avoid watching the same coverage over and over.



Resources for Educators

Teachers and other school personnel may find the following resources helpful following a public tragedy:

NASP Resources - [A National Tragedy: Helping Children Cope](#)

NASP Resources - [Coping with Crisis: Helping Children with Special Needs](#)

NASP Resources - [Managing Strong Emotional Reactions to Traumatic Events: Tips for Parents and Teachers](#)

NASP Resources - [School Safety and Crisis Resources](#)

NASP Resources - [Suggestions for Dealing with the Media](#)

NCTSN - [Helping Youth After Community Trauma: Tips for Educators](#)

NCTSN - [Resources for School Personnel](#)



Resources for Parents

Fostering Perspectives - [Adopting and Parenting a Child with a History of Trauma](#)

Fostering Perspectives - [Trauma and children: An introduction for foster parents](#)

HelpGuide.org - [Traumatic Stress: How to Recover from Disasters and Other Traumatic Events](#)

Kid's Health - [Helping Kids Cope with Stress](#)

MSPCC - [Helping Previously Traumatized Children Cope with Public Tragedy](#) [page 5]

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