



## TIPS FOR PARENTS TO HELP THEIR CHILD AFTER A DISASTER

**Children process traumatic events at their own pace.** Be available to discuss the event on more than one occasion, as children's interest in and questions about what happened will change over time.

**Don't judge one child's reactions to loss by another's.** Reassure your child that it is normal to experience different reactions to trauma, including anger, guilt and sadness. Children may also be told that people express their feelings in different ways.

**Mood changes are to be expected in children following a significant loss or upsetting events.** Be aware of and patient with these possible fluctuations in your child's emotional world.

**Encourage children to express and communicate their feelings.** Help your child to identify constructive ways to express feelings such as anger and sadness. Encourage children to write their thoughts, feelings and experiences in a journal, or to draw pictures of their experiences.

**Talk to children about the different feelings people, including you, may experience after a tragedy.** Express your feelings honestly, but do your best to avoid alarming or upsetting your child further.

**Find a quiet place and time to speak with your child and be available for questions.** It is often best to start a conversation by finding out what the child already knows, and then listening to find out what questions he has. It is OK to say "I don't know" if your child asks you a question you cannot answer.

**Provide children with honest and direct information about what has occurred.** To the extent that your child wishes to discuss what happened, engage in

open conversations, using language she understands.

**Allow your child to retain as much of his daily routines as possible during stressful times.** By maintaining familiar schedules, children will gradually re-establish feelings of normalcy.

**Encourage children to help out and volunteer.** Children tend to recover more quickly from a traumatic event when they feel they are contributing to others' recovery.

**Monitor exposure to media coverage,** including television, radio and newspapers. For all children, overexposure can be overwhelming, and may lead to feelings of distress and helplessness.

**Try to remain calm.** This will not only show your child that you are still in control, but it will also teach her how to handle stressful situations in a thoughtful way.

**Reassure children that they are safe and are being taken care of.** Reassurances may need to be repeated frequently, even after the immediate event has passed.

**Remember that children who had difficulty before the event, such as emotional problems or exposure to previous trauma, may be particularly vulnerable.** If you are concerned about your child, or if emotional and/or behavioral problems persist for more than 6 weeks, consult with a mental health professional.

Source: New York University Child Study Center, "Caring for Kids After Trauma, Disaster and Death: A Guide For Parents and Professionals." Used with permission.