

# Tips for helping your child through a traumatic event

Children do not have the ability to communicate worries or concerns



vocabulary. Teens have the vocabulary, however, they may lack the maturity and life experience to properly identify the feelings that they are having. Both children and teens are impacted by the influences that surround them.

For a parent or guardian, a traumatic event is frightening. It can be even more frightening and unsettling for children. Like the adults around them, they too experienced the same event. The children in your life have also been exposed to the same photographs, stories in print media and television images.

Children are like sponges, taking in the world. They are very aware when the adults around them are having a strong emotional reaction. They need to have their feelings validated. It is important to remember that a child not talking about an event does not mean that the event is forgotten or has no importance. Children and teens are more likely to express their reactions through their actions rather than words. Be attentive and take special care through this time of chaos and instability.

The children in your life need your reassurance that they are safe with you. It is important to let them know that it is healthy to express emotions and to let them out. During this time, children will likely be highly sensitive and attentive to the adult responses surrounding them.

The children in your care will need reassurance that their safety and security will be taken care of by the adults in their lives. They will need encouragement to express their concerns. An extra hug, talk time or five more minutes before bedtime are some examples of what you can do to encourage and reassure them. Let them tell you what they need by paying attention to what they are doing or asking for.

## **Potential reactions that you might see in your child**

Irritability, agitation, confusion

Withdrawn, denial, sadness

Sleep disturbance, nightmares

Increased anxiety, intense fear

Changes in appetite

Distress due to work or travel related parental absence

Testing house rules-dress, curfew, chores

Quietness, less communicative

Feelings of helplessness or anger

More prone to accidents/clumsiness

Verbal outbursts

Poor concentration

Return/increase of bed-wetting or other regressive behaviour

The reactions are usually temporary and will often subside in three to six weeks. In the meantime though, these reactions can be uncomfortable, impacting concentration, productivity and even disrupting sleep patterns.

### **What you can do**

Talk to your child about the disaster

Encourage your child to talk

Say it is OK to be afraid

Tell your child about your plans each day

Put order in your day as best you can

Hold and hug