

In the Aftermath of Terrorism

In the wake of our national tragedy, we join you in your concerns about how best to address the needs of our children. Seeing frightening or distressing events such as those shown on television or other media can take away a child's basic sense of safety and security, just as it does for adults. We all share in the terrible sense of loss. As adults, though, it is our job to try our best to support each other and our children and come together as individuals, families, communities and a nation to cope with these events.

As a parent, listening to your child and understanding what your child feels are the first steps to help them. Identifying and naming their feelings helps children start to understand and cope with their feelings. It is particularly important to help them realize now what will keep them safe in their own lives and reassure them.

What Can You Expect?

Children communicate their upset feelings in many different ways. Over the next days and weeks, you may see the following reactions in your children:

- Questions of local safety and security
- Anger and thoughts about revenge
- Fighting with peers, parents, or other adults or not being able to get along
- Frequent nightmares or waking in the night
- Wanting to stay close by their parents
- Easily startled, jumpy, or uneasy
- Irritability, fussiness, difficult to soothe
- Using play to act out the events over and over
- Seeming more quiet, withdrawn, upset
- Tearfulness, sadness, talking about scared feelings or scary ideas
- Problems paying attention or behavior problems at home or at school
- Daydreaming or being distracted

How Can You Help?

For some children, going over the events with the adults they trust can help them feel less alone. Giving them time to talk about their questions and concerns can be very helpful. For other children, talking about what happened may be very hard. They may show their distress in other ways, such as upsetting behaviors. Recognizing your child's many different reactions can be the most important beginning to helping your child recover.

After a tragedy such as this, many children and adults will appear very distressed – often this is a “normal” reaction to an “abnormal” situation. But if you think your child is still having difficulties after several days and has having trouble in school, at home, or with peers, then help from someone who has experience working with children in such situations may be useful to you and your child. You can contact the Child Development-Community Policing Program of the National Center for Children Exposed to Violence (www.ncccev.org) at 203-785-7047 for help or to answer your questions.