

# Responding to the Needs of Children in Crisis



## Reactions to trauma

### Preschoolers (2 – 6 years)

- Crying
- Thumb sucking
- Repetitive nonverbal traumatic play
- Difficulty sleeping
- Separation anxiety
- Irritability
- Loss of bladder/bowel control
- Think they can reverse the loss (magical/superhero thinking)
- Strong affected by adults' reactions
- Confusion & immobility
- Regressive speech

### School Aged (7 – 11 years)

- Fighting
- Retelling & traumatic replaying of the event with cognitive distortions & obsessive detailing
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Fears relating to safety
- Confusion
- Overwhelmed by their own feelings
- Feeling responsible/guilty about their own actions during the event
- Closing observing parents; concern about disturbing parents with own anxieties
- Concern for family
- Understand permanence of losses
- Difficulty concentrating

### Preadolescents & Adolescents (12 – 18 years)

- Withdrawal & isolation
- Feeling shame & guilt
- Self-conscious about their reactions
- Aggressive behavior (revenge)
- Engage in risky behavior (drug use, sexual acting out, delinquent behavior)
- Shifts in relationships/attachments
- Depression
- Anger
- Confusion

- Early engagement in adulthood (leaving school, getting married) or difficulty entering adulthood (leaving home)

## Helping Children Cope

### General Responses

- Maintain or return to routine, calm and order as soon as possible
- Let children know it is okay and normal to feel upset
- Give children opportunities to express themselves
- Tell the children the truth
- Tailor responses to the developmental stage of the child

### Classroom activities

- Write poetry or stories about the disaster
- Draw pictures & discuss. Remember to include pictures of “hope”.
- Discuss ways of coping.
- Write a letter to the emergency response workers.
- Discuss ways to support or help others.
- Read stories about similar situations
- Tie ribbons to wear as a symbol.
- Draw a mural as a class project.
- Collect donations or items or money to help those in need.
- Create a story book about the event from pictures, stories & poems from the students.
- Discuss loss, grief & reactions to trauma.
- Discuss ways of preventing or preparing for disaster.
- Discuss safety, its loss after disaster and way to feel safe again.

### At Home with Family

- Make extra time to be with your children
- Reduce the children's exposure to media about the event
- Keep routines
- Respond to their need to be close

- Remember that stress can affect your children's health. Watch their amount of sleep, activities & meals.
- Allow children to talk or play repetitively about the disaster clarifying areas of confusion.

### Reading Resources for Children

Erin's House, Center for Grieving Children, Reading List,  
[http://www.erinshouse.org/?page\\_id=948](http://www.erinshouse.org/?page_id=948)

### Sources of additional information

The Dougy Center: The National Center for Grieving Children and Families  
<http://www.dougy.org/>

After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools  
[http://www.sprc.org/library\\_resources/items/af\\_tersuicide-toolkit-schools](http://www.sprc.org/library_resources/items/af_tersuicide-toolkit-schools)

National Association of School Psychologists, School Safety and Crisis Resources,  
[http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/index.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/index.aspx)

Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA Kids: Resources for Parents and Teachers, <http://www.ready.gov/kids>

Education World, Helping Children Cope: Teacher Resources for Talking About Tragedy,  
[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr369.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr369.shtml)

Helping Children Recover from Exposure to Trauma: Resources for Child Care Providers and Parents, US Dept. of Health & Human Services  
[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/1210\\_resources\\_for\\_trauma\\_exposed\\_children.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/1210_resources_for_trauma_exposed_children.pdf)

Responding to Children's Problem Sexual Behaviour in Elementary Schools, British Columbia Ministry of Education  
<https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/resourcedocs/probsexbehave.pdf>

Terr, Lenore C. (1990) Too Scared To Cry

### References

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). (2002). A National Tragedy: Helping children cope. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists. Retrieved 12 December 2006 from [http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/terror\\_general.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/terror_general.aspx)

Young, M.A. (2002). The community crisisresponse team training manual. Washington, D.C.:

### Developed by:

[www.restorativecommunityconcepts.com](http://www.restorativecommunityconcepts.com)  
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