

## Helping Children Cope with Trauma

After any disaster, children are most afraid that the event will recur, that they or someone they love will be hurt or killed, that they may be separated from those they love and be left alone. Here are ways that you can help children cope with trauma:

1. Children under the age of 6 should not be exposed to TV videotape coverage of traumatic events, and the viewing time allowed older children should be limited.
2. Allow children to express their feelings about what has happened and share your feelings with them. Regressive behavior (i.e., thumb-sucking, night wakings, and bed wetting) may occur in response to the trauma. Do not punish or scold the child for the behavior, but instead try to help him or her put their feelings into words.
3. Reassure children that they are now safe and that they are loved.
4. Be honest with children about what has occurred and provide facts about what happened. Children usually know when something is being sugar-coated.
5. Try to return yourself, your children, and your family to as normal a routine as possible. This helps provide a sense of security and safety.
6. Spend extra time with your child, especially doing something fun or relaxing for both of you.
7. Remember the importance of touch. A hug can reassure children that they are loved.
8. Review family safety procedures so children will feel prepared the next time an emergency situation occurs.
9. Talk with teachers, baby-sitters, daycare providers and others who may be with children so they understand how the child has been affected.
10. Watch for signs of repetitive play in which children re-enact all or part of the disaster. Although excessive re-enactment of a traumatic experience may be a warning sign, this behavior is an appropriate form of expression of emotions. Encourage a child who is not able to articulate their express their feelings through coloring, drawing, or painting.
11. Praise and recognize responsible behavior and reassure children that their feelings are normal in response to an abnormal situation.