

Suggestions for Parents When Responding to a Crisis

A crisis is generally viewed as a temporary state of emotional upset or disorganization. It's characterized by a person's inability to cope with a particular event or situation using his customary coping strategies and problem solving skills. The impact on an individual depends on the event or situation and on how that person perceives it in relation to his life. Crisis may offer the opportunity for significant learning and growth if resolved and integrated into a person's life and functioning, as well as for negative consequences.

If your child is involved in or affected by a tragedy or other type of crisis, there are some general guidelines or suggestions that may help you to better understand and respond to the situation. Please be alert to your child's individual needs, behaviors, feelings and perceptions.

- Display your confidence and coping ability by expressing yourself openly and honestly. You are the most important role model for your child.*
- Make yourself available and accessible to your child if and when he wants to talk. Be flexible and responsive to his needs.*
- Try to maintain as much of a routine and sense of "normalcy" as you can, but be tolerant of temporary changes, upsets, and needs. Do not be too demanding or structured.*
- Communicate/demonstrate your concern, care, support, understanding, and acceptance. Do not be judgmental or use words like "should" or "must" with respect to feelings and behaviors.*
- Listen to your child when he wants to talk and try to communicate that you understand and accept what he has to say. If he does not want to talk, do not force discussion, but let him know that you are willing to listen whenever the need or desire does arise. Do not assume that your child is not reacting or will not react simply because you do not observe an initial reaction.*
- Do not try to "rescue" your child or force him to feel better. Be patient and allow him to recover at his own pace and in his own way.*
- Do not try to protect or isolate your child from "threatening" topics or issues, especially those that he is trying or needing to deal with in order to work through and learn from the crisis.*