

Tips for Parenting During Times of Crisis

from the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy

- **Model calm and control.** Reassure children that they are safe and so are the other important adults in their lives.
- **Make time to talk with your children about crisis events.** Take some time and determine what you wish to say. This is especially true since new information will unfold each day. Provide brief, accurate, and age appropriate information. Don't dwell on the scale or scope of the tragedy, particularly with young children.



- **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.** Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their lives will not change. Upper elementary school children will be more vocal in asking questions about their safety and what is being done. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy.
- **Understand what your child is asking.** Difficult questions that children ask may be spurred by curiosity or feelings. Rather than plunging into an immediate answer, learn what motivates the question. Ask, "What made you think of that?" or "What ideas do you have?" Once the meaning of a question is known, it is easier to answer effectively.
- **There may be questions we cannot answer.** Rather than invent a response, it is more helpful to say "I don't know," or "I'll try to find out."
- **Acknowledge, validate, and accept your child's feelings.** He or she may be feeling confused, frightened, or even excited. Listen calmly and reassuringly as they express their thoughts and feelings.
- **Limit the amount of your child's television viewing of these events.** If they must watch, watch with them for a brief time; then turn the set off. Young children should not be allowed to watch tv coverage of the event, as they are too young to process what they are seeing and hearing.
- **Maintain a "normal" routine.** To the extent possible stick to your family's normal routine for dinner, homework, chores, bedtime, etc. Children feel secure when routines are calmly followed.
- **Spend extra time reading or playing quiet games with your children before bed without the television or news radio on.** These activities are calming, foster a sense of closeness and security, and reinforce a sense of normalcy.

Common Signs that Children May be in Need of Extra Assistance

Children may demonstrate observable behaviors that signal feelings of distress and a need for additional support. Some of these include:

- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Withdrawal from friends, family and regular activities
- Preoccupation with death
- Changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts and/or feelings

Additional Resources

[Helping Children Cope With Crisis](#)

[Natural Disasters: Helping Kids During Crisis](#)

[How to Support Your Child's Resilience During a Time of Crisis](#) (in English and Spanish)

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