

Helping children after a disaster

- Limit children's viewing of TV news about disasters to prevent them from becoming more distressed
- Talk about it if they need to talk about it
- Keep their days normal
- Keep their activities normal
- Let them know they are safe and secure. Experts agree that it is important for children to be told that their parents and others will love and protect them during difficult times
- Let them participate in any charitable giving or fundraising the family makes
- Let them write a journal
- Let them send cards or emails
- Let them express their feelings in drawings and art
- Spend more time communication with your child.

Helpful Resources

KIDS HELPLINE

1800 55 1800 National 24 hour helpline

NSW Health 1800 201 123 Counselling

Seasons For Growth - a peer support program about change and loss for children, adolescents and adults. Contact NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief 6882 9222

Parent Line 13 22 89

Victorian Parent Centre - www.vicparenting.com.au

Disaster and Coping

www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/ptsd/disaster.html

The Child Trauma Academy - www.childtrauma.org

For more information
or a Chapter or Branch near you
please contact

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The child's response is different from an adults

Though children have the same sorts of feelings as adults they show them differently. Emotional states may come and go. It is important to let your child know that these feelings are OK.

Children often express their feelings through their behaviour, play and even drawings. Adults should not be alarmed if children act out disaster scenes or draw them. They may talk about their toys or imaginary friends about their sadness. This is a way for them to make meaning out of what has happened.

Children are curious and are searching for explanations. How did this happen? Often the grief is acted out in bad behaviour. It is helpful to give firm non-punitive disciplinary guidelines, this will help to support the child through the chaos of emotions.

Children absorb concepts about grief very slowly and a little at a time. It is normal for a child to be sad for a little while, then go outside and happily play. They may ask questions over and over, even for weeks or months, or they may hide their feelings, often to protect adults from further pain.

Children sense the emotion around them, react to body language and overheard conversations and television news. We want to protect children but it is not helpful to exclude or isolate them by not talking about death or disasters.

Children's fantasies can be much worse than reality...

Helping the child through grief...

1. Get back a regular household routine as soon as possible.
2. Let the child know he/she is safe and protected.
3. Try to understand the child's behaviour. Sometimes he/she does not have the words to express grief.
4. Involve the child in ceremony to say goodbye.
5. Talk about bad dreams.
6. Let the child help you in an age appropriate way.
7. Look together at photos of the person who has died.
8. Give the child a memento of the person who has died.
9. Let the school know about the death.
10. Don't lean on the child for comfort and support. Let the child stay a child.

These suggestions also apply to grief experienced after divorce, death of a pet, moving house / school, losses after bushfires, storms etc...

Helping your child through trauma

The way in which we talk to your children about distressing situations can teach them a lot about how to cope with negative things that happen in the world.

- Do not force discussion of the traumatic event
- Try not to make the discussion too detailed. Children are often happy with a few ideas and will come back later for more detail
- If your child wants to discuss a disaster, check on their understanding of what they have seen and heard. Sometimes what they are concerned about is not what you might expect. Use words and concepts they understand
- When talking about traumatic events, give

children simple, factual information. Avoid talking in images that can hold of their imagination

- Point out how rare such events are, and how people dealt with them in the past
- Keep communicating, talk about what is happening, this prevents children from feeling alone, isolated and misunderstood
- Reassure them they are safe and cared for
- Allow expressions of emotions - they are part of the healing process
- Do some fun things as a family.

When to seek help

If these common reactions continue for more than a few days further help may be needed:

- Severe and continued sleep disturbance
- Severe anxiety on separation from loved ones
- Continued fears about things which may remind the child of the trauma
- Behavioral problems at school or home
- A return to "babyish" behaviour they had grown out of.

