

What Can Parents Do To Address The Reactions Of Their Child To A Crisis Situation?

As parents you are probably the most influential factor in the recovery of your child from the emotional consequences of a crisis. Since **you** are the most emotionally involved with your child, your support, encouragement and reassurance is of utmost importance in your child's recovery.

Following are some ways you can address the reactions of your child to a crisis situation.

- **Provide accurate information.** Speak to your child regarding the crisis and provide him/her with accurate information regarding the crisis in a language that he/she can understand.
- **Listen carefully.** Your child needs to feel that he/she is allowed to express his/her thoughts and feelings regarding the crisis without the fear that he/she will be judged negatively.
- **Provide reassurance.** Your child needs constant reassurance that things will get better and that in the long-term things will improve. This should only be stated if it is indeed true. No false statements regarding the future should be made in an effort to help your child feel better in the present. This will only lead to false hopes and distrust in the future.
- **Be there.** Reassure your child that you will continue to "be there" for him/her, and that you will see them through the aftermath of the crisis.
- **Provide comfort.** Your child may need additional affection in the form of hugs and other physical contact.
- **Keep in touch.** You will most likely need to keep in touch with your child's teacher to monitor his/her academic performance.
- **Ask questions.** Don't be hesitant to ask an adolescent child how he/she is coping even though you may expect an answer of "fine." The fact that you ask will most likely be important to your adolescent child, even though he/she may not show this.

When should your child receive additional help in the form professional intervention?

With support and reassurance from you and others in your family, intervention from school personnel, and the passage of time, your child should be able to recover from the effects of a crisis and return to pre-crisis functioning. He/she should be able to meet the demands of his/her environment, most particularly his/her home and school environments. However, some children and adolescents will need more help perhaps over a longer period of time in order to heal.

Children and adolescents who may require the help of a mental health professional include those who show *avoidance behavior*, such as resisting or refusing to go places that remind them of the place where the traumatic event occurred, and *emotional numbing*, a diminished emotional response or lack of feeling toward the event. Youngsters who have more common reactions including *re-experiencing* the trauma, or reliving it in the form of nightmares and disturbing recollections during the day, and *hyperarousal*, including sleep disturbances and a tendency to be easily startled, may respond well to supportive reassurance from parents and teachers.

**For more help contact your child's school counselor.
More information is also available at www.nihm.nih.gov**