

Helping Children during a Tragedy

As you struggle to cope with tragic events you may be feeling frightened, confused and vulnerable. Those who have children are asking how they can best help them work through this painful time. Below are some guidelines and helpful suggestions for parents, friends and teachers to assist our youngest victims deal with tragic news:

- ✓ Share the truth about the situation without over-exposing children to the very graphic TV images. Many children can become re-traumatized each time they visualize the "plane crashing into the building" for example. It is better to share information with them through print media since it is not immediate in time, and is less emotional. If they have watched TV, sit with them and explain what is happening and answer their questions.
- ✓ Try not to convey the full extent of your own fear and anxiety to your child. A calm and reassuring approach will be most helpful.
- ✓ Reassure your children they are safe. Explain that community leaders, public safety officials, teachers, principals, and the president are all working hard to make them safe. To assist in feeling safe, contact beloved family and friends to "check in" and let your child talk to them on the phone to assist in reassuring them they are surrounded by people who love them.
- ✓ Maintain as much of a routine as possible. Frightened children are comforted by the structure of the usual daily activities. Pulling your child out of school early and not allowing them to participate in usual sports and drama activities for example deprives them the opportunity to work through their anxiety in their own way.
- ✓ Consider allowing extra time to accomplish usual activities. Leave 10-15 minutes before you need to be at a particular place to avoid the further stress of rushing. Trauma affects our brain's ability to focus and concentrate. Be patient with yourself and your child.
- ✓ Contact your local clergy/spiritual affiliation for guidance. Consider participating in vigil/healing events to assist you in gaining a greater sense of inner peace.
- ✓ In the 2001 US terrorist attacks, children across the country, created woven red, white, and blue bracelets to wear as a symbol of patriotism, solidarity and love. This type of activity can be very helpful.
- ✓ If you are having a difficult time coping contact assistance for yourself. If you are concerned about your child's welfare, contact pediatrician for additional assessment and support.

For more information on helping children in a crisis, contact the Trauma Intervention Program of Merrimack Valley, Inc. at 978-975-8471 or by email info@traumaintervention.com or on the Internet at www.traumaintervention.com.