

## **HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH TRAUMA**

When challenged with helping children deal with the aftermath of a disaster, parents and caretakers can be helpful by keeping the following in mind:

- 1) Let your child talk, ask questions, tell what happened. Let them repeat as often as necessary. Be accepting. Create opportunities for this to happen. Some of what they say may sound exaggerated at times but do not over-react or minimize what you are hearing. Correct any misinterpretations of the event to help without sounding judgmental. Avoid any graphic details. Children may resort to younger behaviors than is normal for their age. Keep in mind they have heard words like (monster tornado) which is already a scary term for children.
- 2) Limit the amount of TV time spent watching the news about the disaster. Children need healthy distractions such as play time to restore some normalcy. Try to keep family routines as much as possible. Children may be more clingy than normal. Consistency and predictability are more important now than ever.
- 3) As much as possible limit your stress reactions in front of children. They hear and take in the stress of the adults. However, find some time to de-stress with a trusted friend or family member. Your own self-care is an important factor in the family's healing.
- 4) Answer children's questions honestly but keep your words simple and explanations brief.
- 5) Sometimes children mistakenly think they have somehow contributed to whatever bad things happen in life. Reassure them that some things happen that are nobody's fault.
- 6) We all feel a need to respond in a helpful way to others. Guide your child in finding ways that allow them to feel they are doing something caring for others, such as saying a prayer, drawing a picture or tying a ribbon on a tree or bush to express sympathy
- 7) Point out the wonderful things that are happening in the many acts of kindness in the recovery process. Tell them to look at the helpers and heroes who are using their skills to make things better for people who are hurting and in need.
- 8) Help children identify the range of emotions they are experiencing as well as help them notice how the feelings come and go and then return again. Eventually, when they feel more distance from the event, the feelings will be less strong and scary. Identify a past hard time that the individual or the family endured and have managed to endure. Help them notice the good feelings as well.
- 9) Watch for reactions that don't diminish over time. Some physical or emotional complaints are normal for a time but if they occur beyond a month or so, more help may be needed from a trained professional.
- 10) Most important, time to shower children with extra love, comfort and warmth.
- 11) HUGS! HUGS! HUGS!