

# ***Terrorism: What Parents Can Do To Help Their Children Cope***

*There are several actions that parents (and others) can take following acts of terrorism that can help children cope more effectively. The following "psychological first-aid" recommendations can help prevent long lasting psychological effects.*

## **Your Reaction is Critical.**

Children will look to their parents and other adults for clues on how they should react to acts of terrorism. If they see a lot of alarm and fear they will become scared. Parents who act calmly and in a matter-of-fact manner during times of terrorism send a strong message of security to their children. Try not to "infect" your children with your own worries and anxieties.

**Keep a Normal Schedule.** Try to keep to normal daily routines and schedules as much as possible. When news events interrupt children's routines and schedules they tend to become more anxious.

## **Talk with Your Children.**

Encourage your children to talk about what is going on. Ask them what they have heard. Try to understand their perceptions of what is happening. Correct any inaccuracies they might have (explain that following acts of terrorism there are often many rumors that turn out not to be true). Encourage them to describe what they are feeling. Acknowledge fears they might express but reassure them of their safety. Talk to your children in a calm tone. Tell your children what you know about what is going on at a level they can understand and comprehend. Make sure you don't give them too much information and make them even more anxious.

**Offer Reassurance.** The issue of greatest concern to most children is their safety (and the safety of their family). Reassure your children that you and others are doing their best to protect them. Stress the reasons why your children should feel safe (for example, that they don't live near where the terrorism occurred, outline the specific actions being taken by the government and others to protect them).

## **Encourage and Anticipate**

**Questions.** Your children will likely have many questions that they would like to ask. Encourage them to ask you questions. Try to anticipate their questions so you can think ahead about how you might respond. Common questions include: *Why did it happen? Will it happen to us? Why would someone do that?*

## **Help Your Children Identify Something That They Can Do To**

**Help.** People often feel better if they believe that they are helping those in need. Encourage your children to contribute to the assistance efforts by helping with such activities as raising money (through some activity) or collecting donated items for victims.

## **Focus on The "Positive" Stories.**

Resist the tendency to focus exclusively on the horrific actions of the terrorists. Talk to your children about the heroes and the positive actions of others (firefighters, police officers, individuals who stayed behind in the building to assist people with handicaps who could not go down the stairs). This will help children see that most people are not "evil" but caring and compassionate people who help others. Encourage children to

perform random acts of kindness to help reinforce the importance of caring and compassion.

## **Limit and Monitor Television Viewing.**

There is evidence to suggest that the more children watch television about terrorism the more likely they are to develop anxiety/stress disorders. Limit how much media coverage your children are exposed to. Discuss the media coverage that they are exposed to.

## **Seeking Professional Assistance.**

If your child shows significant or long-lasting problems (for example, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, excessive fears) as a result of the terrorism you should contact your child's health care provider for assistance or referral.



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