

I-CART

Indiana Crisis Assistance Response Team

TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS ABOUT TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Healing from trauma is not serendipitous; it does not simply occur with the passing of time or because children are inherently resilient. There is, in fact, nothing simple about childhood trauma. When ignored, the memories and distress do not go away. (Monahan, 1993)

Talking with children about traumatic events is beneficial in helping them move beyond the event. Adults also have reactions that need to be acknowledged and addressed. The following suggestions and questions can be beneficial in the crisis intervention process for both children and adults. The questions and discussion can be adjusted for all age groups. Giving both children and adults the opportunity to discuss an event through these types of questions can help reduce the impact and/or preoccupation with the event.

TALKING TO THE CHILD/ADOLESCENT:

1. **Listening.** The single most important support that a caring adult can provide is a listening ear. Let the child talk and lead the discussion. Good listening involves acknowledging and accepting all feelings, fears and concerns as real. Reflecting back what you have heard; echoing words or phrases that you have heard the child use; clarifying what you have heard; helping the child find new or alternative words that repeat or enhance what is being said; and periodically summarizing (briefly) what you have heard the child say, are all good listening skills.
2. **Provide opportunities to talk.** If a child is not talking about an event, it does not necessarily mean that he/she does not need to talk about it or is through talking about it. Continue to provide opportunities to talk. Some children (and adults) may need to be able to talk about the disaster with a special emphasis on what they have seen, what they have heard, and what they are experiencing physically and emotionally.
3. **Normalize children's reactions and feelings.** Let them know that their feelings, behavior, etc. are common reactions, even for adults. Avoid saying... "you shouldn't feel that way" or "you don't need to worry about that." Rather than being reassuring, it tells the child that he/she is "wrong" in how he/she is feeling.
4. **Support systems.** Help children identify and/or reconnect with their support systems. This may be family, clergy, school staff, etc. Talk about what are the things they normally do to make them feel safe or deal with their feelings.
5. **Coping skills.** Help children reconnect and/or use their coping skills (drawing, music, writing, play, exercise, reading, security limits, etc.)



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Comforting a Bereaved Child

Five ways to help children handle the loss of someone loved:

- *Allow your child to say good-bye*

A child who is five or older might help select a passage to be read or pick out some music. Explain what will happen during the last rites and let the child decide whether to attend or not.

- *Reminisce*

Open a photo album and talk about happy times you've had with the deceased. If your child does not want to talk, don't push it. Let the child know that you'll be there when talking feels right.

- *Hug or hold your child often*

Many kids worry that others will treat them like a diseased person, as if death is contagious. However, lots of physical contact will reassure them.

- *Ask for help*

You may not always be able to attend to your child's needs if you're still dealing with your own grief, so reach out: Find out if a friend, relative or teacher can spend some extra time with your child. Notify the school or daycare center so that the staff can offer support.

- *Take a break from mourning*

As soon as the family is emotionally ready, try to do some of the same activities that you used to do before the tragedy struck.

Suggested readings for kids

- *Where's Jess?* (Written by Joy and Marv Johnson, illustrated by Shari Barum)
- *I Heard Your Mommy Died* and *I Heard Your Daddy Died* (Written by Mark Scrivani, illustrated by Susan Aitken)
- *My Grandson Lew* (Written by Charlotte Zolotow, illustrated by William Pene du Bois)
- *Blew and the Death of the Mag* (Written by Wendy Lichtman, illustrated by Diane Mayers)
- *Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs* (Written and illustrated by Tommie dePaola)
- *Part of Me Died, Too* (Written by Virginia Lynn Fry)