

## Helping Children Cope with Traumatic Events

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Traumatic events take various forms. Unfortunately, many of us have experienced events such as fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, accidents, and encounters with community violence and racial profiling. Currently in the US there's a climate of fear for immigrants, and children suffer from not knowing what will happen next. We need to be prepared to handle our reactions in difficult times so we can be available for children who count on us to protect and teach them to handle their own reactions.

### Suggestions:

- Be aware of your emotions, take a minute to calm down, and respond to children in a thoughtful and honest manner. If you are overwhelmed by your reactions, find an adult with whom you can talk.
- You may have a worried look on your face, or you may be crying. As soon as you can, focus on what the children need. Let your voice, gestures, and body language begin to offer reassurance.
- **Children want to know that they'll be safe.** Find something you can say that will give comfort. You can honestly say, "I will do everything I can to protect you."
- Talk about the situation at hand, based on each child's comprehension level and sensitivity. Keep your explanations simple. Give information that will clarify facts. Listen to what the children are saying to each other.
- If children see people yelling, fighting, or crying, and they feel afraid, acknowledge their feelings, talk about what's going on, and move them away from the situation as soon as possible. You can say that you were upset, but that now you're doing fine.
- Always find out what the children already knows or believes. You may need to start your conversation by correcting misinformation.
- Tell children about the things your family and school does to help them stay safe. Review any routines, such as "Duck and cover" for an earthquake or "Stop, drop, and roll" for a fire. Teach children an emergency plan, including learning their full name, phone number, and safe places to go in their home and neighborhood.
- Observe your children's play. Some children will act out what has upset them. If you're dealing with a serious problem or loss, use art, music, or writing to express feelings. Read books, take walks, and notice things around you that are healthy and beautiful.
- Set up a number scale with children where (0) is when they've felt the worst ever and had a terrible day and (10) is when they've felt the happiest and had a great day. This is a way to check in to see what kind of day they're having. Ask what they could do to change their day to a higher number.

When a difficult or traumatic situation occurs, do your best to stay calm, alert, and respectful to others. Your children are watching you, and they will learn by what you do even more than by what you say.

### Resources:

- [www.talkingwithkids.org/first.html](http://www.talkingwithkids.org/first.html)
- [www.talkingwithkids.org/violence.html](http://www.talkingwithkids.org/violence.html)
- *Big Bad News* by Marisol Muñoz-Kiehne, PhD, [www.centering.org](http://www.centering.org)

