

# What Parents Can Do To Help Children Deal with Crisis

While there are no quick fixes for children or anyone during times of crisis, there are things we can do as adults and parents to help children manage. Thankfully, most children are very resilient and are capable of handling difficult situations, especially when surrounded by caring, perceptive, responsive adults. These are simple reminders that may help parents guide children through crisis events:

No two children handle these situations the same way. For children, there isn't a certain way for them to act or react in the face of tragedy or crisis, especially if they haven't experienced it before.

Keep **structure** and **routine** as **normal** as possible.

**Reassure your child** that he/she is **safe**.

It is very important that **adults model calm reassurance**. Children pick up on every cue and nuance, so it is important to try to remain in control. At the same time, it's o.k. for parents to show grief openly. It's not o.k. to pretend that the event didn't happen or that it isn't important or to attempt to minimize it.

**Be real** with your children. A crisis offers opportunities to have conversations with children about what a family believes, what is important, and how they will work together to heal and be o.k.

**Validate your child's thoughts and feelings. Ask them what they think and what they are feeling.** When children ask questions, answer the questions as honestly and directly as possible. Keep your answers short and to the point.

**Stick to facts** – don't fill in details that are not known; don't try to explain the unexplainable. Know that is **O.K. to say, “I don't know.”** - “This is all we know right now.” It's O.K. not to have the answers.

It's **normal to be angry** when bad and violent things happen to people. It's also very important for **parents to help children deal with their anger, disappointment, fear or hurt in healthy ways.** It's **never healthy to lash out** at others or to **assign blame to those who aren't directly responsible.** Adult reactions and responses guide children's actions.

**Watch for symptoms** that your child may exhibit indicating a need for **extra attention** – physical, emotional or psychological. Use your best judgment. Ask for help if you think it's needed. Your physician, the school counselor, a teacher, or trusted family friend, etc. may need to be consulted.

Most parents want very much to protect and shield their children from traumatic and hurtful events. The fact is there are life events over which we have little or no control and they can really hurt. **Our job** as parents and adult role models is to **help children work through and process** the hurt and shock. By **listening, validating feelings and thoughts, and by “just being there”** we can help children find inner strength to handle adversity.