

## Tips for parenting children who have been traumatized

- 1. *Be alert for signs of anxiety.*** Children may become frightened when exposed to media coverage of the traumatic event (an untimely death, rape, murder, fire, etc.). Fear and anxiety can be manifested by attention-getting behavior, physical complaints, regressive symptoms and declining school performance. A child's emotional reaction often reflects an adult's response to the crisis.
- 2. *Find out what a child knows*** about the event and their feelings concerning it. Listen to them tell their story and use open questions when necessary. Avoid closed or leading questions. Be especially careful to avoid contaminating the memory of children who may need to testify in court, however. This may hurt their case in court.
- 3. *Explain the "who, what, and where."*** Children who do not know the facts will fantasize their own version of reality. This can create more stress than would occur from a clear and understandable explanation of the actual events.
- 4. *Explanations need to be geared to the child's age level.*** Some children may be quite sophisticated, others not. Attempt to answer all inquiries in a way that children can comprehend. The nature of a child's inquiry can usually guide a parental response. Let children set the pace of questioning, but don't avoid answering direct questions.
- 5. *Create a supportive environment*** in which children can discuss their feelings and even debate their opinions. Talking about feelings honestly in a supportive environment is crucial. A parent also needs to be sensitive that discussion is not inhibited when a child disagrees with an adult opinion. Exposure to differing viewpoints is healthy.
- 6. *Parents need to be honest*** about their emotions and what's going on. Encourage children to discuss feelings and their concerns. Protecting children from reality can do more harm than good.
- 7. *Avoid stereotypes.*** While a child may have been hurt by a man/woman/black/white/gay/straight person, help your child learn to tell the difference between those people who hurt and those who don't. Introduce your children to friends who are strong, courageous and gentle from each of these groups.
- 8. *Make sure that you don't blame your child -- even indirectly.*** A child's beliefs often reflect not just the family environment but relatives, friends, school and church beliefs. Often children will draw conclusions different than parents about events, for example, many children conclude that their parents divorced because of them. Children who are not believed and supported do worse than those who are.
- 9. *Talk about moral issues.*** Often important moral issues are raised by a traumatic event. Don't shy away from talking about these.
- 10. *Remember the good things.*** Traumas can lead people to develop a more pessimistic view of the world and the future. Remember to take time to enjoy the things that you enjoyed before. Remember the good people around you and that not everything is bad.