

Stay Calm

Kids naturally take cues from the emotional messages of adults. The best way to reassure a child of their safety and security is to make sure that you are managing and measuring your own emotions while your children are watching. If adults sound look worried, children will worry. If adults seem anxious in their speech, children will feel anxious. You are not only being watched but our children overhear your remarks as well as what you may say to them directly.

Illustration)—I prefer an aisle seat when I fly. Partly because of my height and stature, but inevitably when the plane hits turbulence, I want to see the flight attendants and watch their reactions.

Using a caring and matter-of-fact face and voice, adults can help kids by making true statements that contain a positive message. For example, “I am sad that this happened, and we are all going to work on ways to be safe everywhere in our town and neighborhood.” Or, “This is hard for everybody. Even though we are very sad and worried right now, lots of people are working hard to make sure that everyone stays safe.” Remember to be factual. If a child asks a question and you don’t know the answer, you can simply say, “I don’t know.”

Of course, in the face of a tragedy, adults often need support too. When we feel overwhelmed, it’s important to seek help from other adults away from children. We are verbal processors... do not speak in unfiltered ways within earshot of children.

Take Charge of What Children Hear and See From the Media

Media stories about tragic events can be compelling and cause us to believe that watching is doing something important and helpful. The problem is that exposure to terrifying images and horrifying stories is often unnecessarily traumatizing for adults

and kids alike. Seeing upsetting situations on TV can feel as if it is still happening right now, even though the event is over. Unless you are in the midst of an emergency where you truly need minute-by-minute updates for your safety, **turn off** the radio, television, and Internet so that kids are not bombarded with this information. There is a difference between staying informed so we can take action if need be and becoming consumed with the need to know immediately in a way that becomes traumatic.

Explain what Happened in a Calm, Age-Appropriate Way

Focus on reassurance and hope rather than going over the details again and again about what happened. Children are literal thinkers, so be careful when using words like “sick” or “insane” or “crazy”.

For example, children who know of a family tragedy can be told, “This is very sad, and we will do everything in our power to make sure that this will not happen here again. This child’s dad was so hurt inside that he did hurtful things. He did not know how to get help with his problems. We are going to do what we can to make sure everyone who has problems knows how to get help.”

For tragedies that are dramatic but happen rarely, you can say, “This almost never happens. This is very scary and very sad. We are going to do our best to make sure that it doesn’t happen again.” Describe some of the things that are being done to ensure safety in your community, at your school, and in your family.

Help Young People to Express Their Feelings Without Making Them Take Care of Your Feelings

Tragic events can bring up feelings of upset, worry, sadness, and anger for adults and children. However, it is not a child's job to take care of adult feelings.

Instead of being burdened with adult feelings, children need us to help them understand and work through their own feelings. *Listen when kids talk, even if they say the same things over and over.* Give reassuring answers to worried questions. If this is a child's first experience with death, be prepared to explain what death is. If a child is worried because of injustice, be prepared to explain how our society values justice and has laws and law enforcement to protect the innocent. If they are worried about how a peer/classmate has been effected, let them know that our society has special organizations specifically designed to help children who have experienced crime and lost their parents....

Dealing with upsetting experiences is a process that can involve many feelings over a long time. Some children have difficulty talking about their feelings. Give kids alternative ways to express their feelings. They can write a letter, draw a picture, plant a flower, or help someone else. Many kids work out their feelings through play or stories.

Sometimes children can feel so overwhelmed by their feelings that they shut them off. It's normal for some kids to cope with an upsetting situation by pretending it's not happening, but unresolved, suppressed feelings can lead to problems such as depression. If a child seems to be very shut down, getting professional advice is important.

Sometimes adults want so badly for children to feel better that they do not give them permission to be upset. Pressure to pretend to feel a certain way can become especially intense around family celebrations or events. If a child doesn't want to go with usual activities, then find ways to engage the child while being supportive of her or his feelings. Instead of trying to force a child to participate, listen to the child, offer choices, and ask, "What would you like to do?"

People grieve differently and at different times in different ways. Accepting children's feelings means letting them know that it is okay to feel sad when they are sad, angry when they are angry, and happy when they are happy. It also means that we teach them to use words to share their feelings rather than demonstrate negative feelings through behavior.

Give Young People Positive Ways to Feel in Control

Tragedies often leave people feeling helpless and out of control. Give kids opportunities to regain their sense of power and control by letting them make positive choices when possible. This can be as simple as deciding what to have for dinner or which game to play, or allowing them to pick a special treat at the grocery store.

Give Extra Support and Reassurance

Hug children as much as they want. Spend time with them. Tell them over and over that you love them and that you are going to do everything you can to keep everybody important to them as safe and healthy as possible.

Be Aware of and Prepared for Behavioral Changes

Rather than express their emotional discomfort in words, kids may complain of physical ailments like an upset tummy or a headache as their response to a crisis. This may be frustrating for family members but it is important to remember to be supportive and patient.

Children and youth might regress into behavior they had when they were younger, such as bedwetting or being clingy. Some

children may have increased anxiety, feel more sad, feel hopeless, and may become sensitive or irritable.

If young people are moody, distracted or aggressive, help them control their behavior without shaming them. “You seem like you may be upset...” “Honey, are you feeling okay? What are you thinking about? Talk to me sweetheart so that I can understand...” Stay away from shaming statements like “What is the matter with you?... What is your problem?”

Or Seek professional help if your child seems unable to move forward without your support alone.

Be a Good Role Model for Handling Conflict

The stress caused by a tragedy can increase irritability for adults too. Minor irritations can lead to major explosions. Even more than usual, young people might be hypersensitive to angry, upset behavior from their parents and other adult family members. Make sure that any anger looks in control rather than out-of-control. Try to resolve conflicts without becoming attacking.

Remember that children and teens are learning more from what you do than from what you tell them. Show how to stay calm and respectful even when you feel upset. Use positive communication skills to work out disagreements. Get help with problems. Walk away from trouble.

It is normal for adults to feel overwhelmed in the face of traumatic events. If adults have difficulty coping, they and their loved ones may benefit greatly from seeking guidance and emotional support from a mental health professional. Often extra counseling services are available through schools, emergency services, and places of worship during and after a tragedy.

Show Children How to Recover From a Bad Situation

Honesty... emotional honesty... grants the privilege of releasing negative feelings so that positive feelings and hope can return.

When we are honest with our emotions and we talk through our feelings, it reassures the mind that we are people capable of compassion and we are committed to do the right things. This prevents community tragedy from imprisoning us in the moment and shackling us to an event for the rest of our lives. “What I am responsible for?” Is another great question to ask. How can I help in the healing process of the victims? Do I play a role in creating a safer community?

None of us want to have to deal with tragedy, but a great deal of learning can happen during hard times. Showing young people how to move through bad situation can create lessons for them that will help them for the rest of their lives.

A Word on Fear—

Fear is a God given emotion that is meant to preserve our lives. Fear-- when it is rational—provokes Flight or Fight response. We will either flee the danger and live. Or we will fight with desperation and live.

Irrational fear immobilizes the victim because the brain attempts to ready itself for a life and death encounter in the moment, but there is no encounter because there is no real threat. This heightened state of fear introduces all kinds of anxiety and complicates mental health.

A Rational Fear requires 2 components

1. Proximity
2. Potency

Healthy fear needs to have both of these in place.

If you can help a child evaluate these two criteria, irrational fear can be overcome. But of course, there are natural limitations to this method.

A Word on Faith—

The irony of “Faith” --- the name of your town is the very word that describes an act of belief that ignites God’s Grace.

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, it’s the evidence of things that are yet to be seen. (Hebrews 11:1) ---
Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)*

Faith Always Ignites Grace.

For by grace you’ve been saved through faith... Ephesians 2:8

What is Grace?

Grace is God’s favor (blessing, protection, provision, love) and the empowerment to be transformed!

Faith is Nonsensical ---

Faith depends on your faith object --- Laws, law enforcement, education systems, community watches, etc. has their limitations. But not God **Hebrews 13:8**

Faith Depends on your knowledge of the faith object---

Unrealistic expectations... **Romans 10:13**
God was keeping you alive.

Faith is an Action Word.

Jas 1:22

So much of our lives is spent as spectators. We want others to somehow fix our problems and make solutions when God has promised to give us everything we need for life and Godliness. He has even promised to make our hearts the home of his Spirit!

But it will require more than just a passive agreement or acknowledgment. It requires fully embracing the message of salvation by **FAITH**.

Grace---

- **There is forgiveness and cleansing from Sin.**
- **In Christ we are now able to achieve our fullest God-given potential.**
- **In Christ, the Devil is a defeated foe!**

What happens if a community of individuals decides to enact personal faith in God?

Grace is supernaturally ignited!!!

A Community with a covering of Grace

- **Conduit of Favor and Empowerment for all within**
- **Little room for sin to find a foundation to build on.**
- **Provision, protection and blessing...**