

Helping children cope:

1. Allow children to express their feelings about what has happened and share your feelings with them proportion to your child's level of maturity.
2. Reassure children that they are safe and that they are loved.
3. Be honest with children about what has occurred and provide facts about what happened. Children usually know when something is being sugar-coated.
4. Help children return to as normal a routine as possible.
5. Spend extra time with your child, especially doing something fun or relaxing for both of you.
6. Remember the importance of touch. A hug can reassure children that they are loved.
7. Review family safety procedures so children will feel prepared the next time an emergency situation occurs.
8. Talk with teachers, baby-sitters, daycare providers and others who may be with children so they understand how the child has been affected.
9. Watch for signs of repetitive play in which children re-enact all or part of the disaster.
10. Praise and recognize responsible behavior and reassure children that their feelings are normal in response to an abnormal situation.

Coping as an adult:

1. Be with other people; let other people help. Don't let foolish pride stand in the way of receiving what you truly need

from relatives, neighbors, friends or volunteers.

2. Talk about your own feelings. Don't just "be strong" for you kids—let others help you and listen to you, just as you listen to your children.
3. Reassure yourself—your feeling and reactions are normal reactions to an abnormal situation.
4. Take care of yourself. Try to get enough sleep, eat regularly, and take time for yourself. And be careful with alcohol and other drugs. In tough times like these, it's easy to abuse them.
5. Get professional help if you have severe problems. If you have had a serious loss, such as the death of a loved one, you may need additional help. Even if you had no serious losses, you still need additional help if you're having extreme reactions such as repeated nightmares, crying spells and/or panic reactions.
6. Be a model for your child; express your reactions, be open to the reactions of others, and support those around you.

**If you and/or your family
need help, please call:**

Counseling and Psychological Services
(540) 568-6484

Support for the production of this brochure provided the Psychology Club at James Madison University.

REACTIONS TO THE CRISIS:

Some guidance on what you can do to help your children, your family, and yourself



**Counseling &
Psychological
Services**

**Human Development Center
James Madison University**

Many of us are curious about ways we can help our children, our families, ourselves and others come to terms with the tragic events of the past few days. Many, if not most of us, have already spoken with friends, family, co-workers, and classmates and are trying to make sense of this tragedy. Although there is a sense of disbelief and helplessness, there are things that we can do to help each other through this crisis.

We would like to offer an awareness of some common reactions to disasters, suggestions on talking with children about these events, and strategies for helping children and yourself cope.

COMMON REACTIONS FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN

1. **Anxiety or Panic**

You may have a sense of anxiety or panic, feeling keyed-up or restless. Children may feel especially anxious when away from caregivers.

2. **Intense Emotions**

You and/or your children may experience intense emotions and/or notice varying feelings such as denial or numbness, intense anger, sadness and tearfulness.

3. **Feelings of losing control**

You may feel a loss of control, fears of more terrorism, a loss of a sense of safety, or feel like "none of this is happening."

4. **Physical Complaints**

You may have physical reactions like headaches, stomachaches, fatigue and muscle tension.

5. **The Need to Discuss the Event**

It is normal to want to talk with our friends, family, etc. to make sense of the tragedy. Some also withdraw from relationships.

6. **Difficulty Sleeping**

It is normal to have difficulty with sleeping when such tragedy occurs. Children may have nightmares or experience bedwetting.

Is there a "normal" reaction?

Reactions depend on many factors such as previous trauma, existing coping mechanisms, support from family and friends, the amount of personal loss—how close it has "hit home" for you.

Experiencing some or all of the above reactions is part of the human process of coping with a tragedy or loss. This is a national tragedy—all of us have lost something.

Talking with your children

Be sure to limit how much your child is exposed to television reports without your supervision and discussion about what is being seen.

1. Open the way for children to talk about what has happened and listen carefully to what he or she has to say.
2. Clarify information if confusion exists. Children may be confused about the facts and/or the magnitude of what happened. You might ask your child "What have you heard about the event at the World Trade Center?" or, "How do

you feel about what happened?" Later on, you might want to ask, "Do you ever think about what happened at the World Trade Center?"

3. Be prepared for a wide range of emotions (sadness, anxiety, fear for their own family's safety, confusion about how to make sense of the events, little reaction, excitement, anticipation, sorrow, and worry). Thank your children for sharing so deeply and affirm how much they are cared about and loved.
4. Answer direct questions in simple and straightforward terms. Keep your responses brief and simple. Follow the lead of children's questions, but don't overburden them with too much information.
5. Older children and adolescents may raise important issues involving terrorism, retaliation, and ethnic and religious questions involving differences between people. Talk to your children about ways to handle conflict resolution. Remind them that the actions of the few do not represent the views of an entire group of people. Children need to talk about and think through these issues with adults they trust.
6. Help children and adolescents to think about how they may pursue a constructive response promoting peace and security in their schools and neighborhoods.