

Ways to Help Your Child and Help Yourself At the Same Time (continued)

First Aid at Home for Children in Crisis

1. Be more nurturing and comforting. Respond to your child's basic needs. Provide him/her with rest, comfort, food, and opportunities to play.
2. Talk openly with your child about what happened.
3. Reinforce with your child that you will protect him/her.
4. Help your child to share his/her feelings in your supportive presence, and acknowledge his/her feelings. Do not tell your child how he/she should or should not feel. Healing takes time - do not hurry your child's reactions along with comments such as, "It's time to get over it."
5. Understand that physical reactions such as headaches, fatigue, etc. can be normal responses to fear and a child's attempts to avoid thoughts of the crisis.
6. Provide labels, especially for younger children, for the feelings they are experiencing, such as sad, afraid, angry, etc.
7. Encourage your child to let you know when he/she is thinking about the crisis or when new reactions occur.
8. Give your child special supports by keeping things fairly structured. Adjust for your child's fears, especially at bedtime.
9. Help to re-establish a sense of safety for your child. Let your child know where you are going and when you will be back. If you are gone for several hours, call and let him/her know that you are all right.
10. Reassure your child that his/her feelings may not be the same as those of siblings or friends, and that those feelings are normal.
11. Be patient with difficulties in concentration, completing schoolwork, etc. It is not unusual for a child's school performance to decline temporarily.
12. Recognize that regressive behavior such as nail biting and thumb sucking, as well as acting-out behaviors are normal reactions and should be discussed rather than punished.
13. Limit tasks and keep them simple.
14. If the crisis involves a death, help your child to recall positive memories of the victim.
15. Share your own similar experiences, giving the message that you survived and that he/she can too.
16. Help your child to understand that angry, defiant, aggressive behaviors, staying away from home, or taking unnecessary risks are ways to avoid feeling the pain, hurt, and fear that he/she is experiencing.
17. If shame is tied to a physical reaction that your child experienced during the crisis (such as wetting his/her pants, vomiting, crying, etc.) assure your child that unlike television portrayals, many people faced with a crisis will lose control over their bodies.
18. If your child expresses that he/she is not afraid of anything anymore ("Nothing scares me."), be more protective of your youngster, as he/she may not act safely in a potentially dangerous situation.
19. Help your child to understand the relationship between his/her feelings and the crisis and encourage your youngster to find safe ways to express his/her feelings (i.e. drawing pictures, writing, talking, exercise, etc.).
20. If changes in your child's behavior or personality concern you, seek the support of a mental health professional.