

MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

HELPING YOUR CHILD AFTER A VIOLENT EVENT

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
JUNE 2023- MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT

It is normal to be concerned about the children in your life when a traumatic or violent event occurs.

Children's mental health can be negatively impacted when directly exposed to these events, or just by seeing it in the media or hearing someone talk about it. Children may feel even more stress when violence occurs in school.

What are signs and symptoms that children may show after a stressful event?

- Difficulty sleeping
- Intrusive thoughts and negative thoughts
- Anger
- Withdrawal, decrease in socialization
- Using substances
- Desensitization to violence or violent behavior
- Anxiety or frequent worries

These signs and symptoms are normal following a stressful event. However, if they last for more than two weeks or continue to get worse, consider reaching out to a mental health professional as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression or grief can occur.

What should I do to support my child?

1. Make time to talk. Do not wait to talk to children about current events. Unfortunately, they may hear about it from others or through the media.
2. Let your child's questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work.
3. Validate your child's feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let your child talk about their feelings, help put their feelings into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
4. Monitor media use and exposure to content about the traumatic event.
5. When scary events are happening, keeping routines can help children feel safe. Despite the stress you may feel as a family, it is important to keep the same schedule and rules as usual.
6. Encourage children to spend quality time with friends and family. You can practice self-care and engage in fun activities together for distraction.

How a parent copes following a traumatic experience is related to how children will react. Remember to take care of yourself too. A few ways to practice Self-Care include: Finding as many ways as possible to lower your stress levels before reaching the point of feeling overwhelmed. Read a book, eat healthy foods, take a walk, and get enough physical activity and sleep. Adjust your mindset, work on a hobby, take a long shower or do something else for 15 or 20 minutes that is solely for your own enjoyment.

Excerpts from: Helping Kids After Violent Events, <https://www.onoursleeves.org>
Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Families and Educators, www.nasponline.org