



Developmental Assets

Do you hold the missing piece?

Dealing with Tragedy

Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: You don't give up.—Anne Lamott, American writer

How do we guide our children through this difficult, confusing, and scary tragedy? How do we and they find hope and comfort, even in the darkest hours? How do we know what to say and do? Here are some suggestions.

Tips for . .

parents with children of all ages

- Recognize that the event, no matter how far away, is likely affecting you and/or your child in important ways. Take time to acknowledge the sadness, fear, or other emotions that you and your children may be feeling.
- Take time as a family to remember the victims with a moment of silence or other ritual that fits your family's beliefs and values. Seek to follow your children's lead if they wish to express their sadness or condolences to the victims.
- Find others to support you if the event is particularly difficult for you to process as a parent. Don't ask your children to be your primary supports.
- Take time to talk about your love for your children. Make yourself available to talk over and over again if necessary about these tragedies.

parents with children ages birth to 5

- Limit your children's exposure to the details of the situation. If you need to have conversations about it with others, read or watch news shows, or otherwise gather and process information, make every attempt to ensure your children are doing something else during this time.
- As much as possible maintain routines, with a little extra flexibility. For example: Keep consistent bedtimes and bedtime rituals, but know that children might need more hugs, soothing stories, an additional nightlight, and other comfort measures.

parents with children ages 6 to 9

- Without going into graphic detail, answer children's questions about the event truthfully and in clear and simple language. Greatly limit their exposure to media coverage.
- Be realistic in your reassurances. Don't say, for instance, "I'll never let anything hurt you." Instead say, "You're safe now, and I'll always try to protect you."
- Encourage children to express emotions through play or art.

parents with children ages 10 to 15

- Ask your children what they're hearing about the situation. They may be hearing lots of rumors and mis-information. Seek to clarify facts that are available.
- Listen when your children start to talk about their emotions concerning the event.
- Know that anger may be a natural extension of other emotions. Anger can make young people feel more in control during times when everything seems out of their control. Help your children find healthy ways to express their anger, such as physical activity, breathing exercises, or expressing themselves through music or other arts.
- Reassure your children that you are doing everything you can to keep your family safe.

parents with children ages 16 to 18

- Don't try to "fix" or make assumptions about what your teenager is feeling. It can take a long time for fears, sadness, or other reactions to surface. Give your full attention when they do express themselves, but also be patient. Don't push them to process things until they are ready.
- Remind your teen that it's important to connect with others during this time, such as extended family, caring adults, and supportive peers.
- As a family, find specific ways to help ease others' pain or troubles that have resulted from the crisis. Send cards of sympathy or encouragement, provide services, or get involved in some other way.