

Helping Children Cope Following a Tragedy

- Discuss the tragic event with your child in a simple and direct manner. Be honest and share clear, accurate information about the tragedy. Children need to hear the truth from someone they love and trust.
- Listen and respect your child's feelings and fears. Let your child know that it is normal to feel worried or upset. Help younger children use words like "angry" and "sad" to express their feelings. Admit your own feelings to your child to encourage open communication, but don't burden a child with your own worries and fears.
- Recognize that children may experience many different feelings such as, anger, sadness, fear, confusion, or guilt. This surge of emotions can be overwhelming and confusing to a child. Discuss these feelings and assure your child that all of them are normal reactions.
- Give your child a creative outlet to express feelings. This can be done through drawing, writing, listening to music, playing games, or talking with dolls or family pets.
- Be patient with repetition. Children need to process and understand what has happened by going over the events again and again. Children may also ask the same questions over and over. Answer their questions directly and consistently each time.
- Reassure your child that he/she is loved and that you are there to take care of him/her. Following a tragic event, children's sense of safety is shaken. Reassure your child that your family is safe.
- Give your child a sense of control. Provide your child with options on how you can best help. Encourage children to be creative in their own way of how they want to get involved or help others.
- As soon as possible, return to your regular routine. Keep rules and boundaries consistent. Children gain security in knowing that daily activities will remain the same.
- Have fun! Encourage children to find comfort in playing with friends. Explain to your child that it is OK for him/her to have fun, laugh, and enjoy life.
- Be aware of common reactions children may have but also be alert to behavior problems that may require professional attention.
- Take care of yourself. Get enough sleep, eat well-balanced meals, stick to regular routines, and reach out for support from others. As an adult, you are a model to children of how to cope with traumatic events.
- Most important, be there for your child. Give extra attention and be affectionate. Spend quality time together as a family.

About The Amelia Center

The Amelia Center is a Birmingham, AL based non-profit organization that serves as a comprehensive community grief-counseling center. The Amelia Center is a support service of Children's Health System and is a United Way of central Alabama agency. The Amelia Center provides individual and family grief counseling services at no charge to individuals. Our services also include loss-specific facilitated grief support groups, Critical Incident Stress Management response teams that serve schools throughout the state of Alabama when there has been a death, and we offer a variety of training and workshops in the area of bereavement and loss-related topics.

For additional information about The Amelia Center, please visit our website at www.ameliacenter.org or call our office at (205) 212-7481.



The Amelia Center
*A place of hope for children
and those who love them*

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