

Helping Children Cope with Trauma

The American Counseling Association recommends 5 ways that you can cope after a crisis situation.

1. Recognize your own feelings about the situation and talk to others about your fears. Know that these feelings are a normal response to an abnormal situation.
2. Be willing to listen to family and friends who have been affected and encourage them to seek counseling if necessary.
3. Be patient with people; fuses are short when dealing with crises and others may be feeling as much stress as you.
4. Recognize normal crises reactions, such as sleep disturbances and nightmares, withdrawal, reverting to childhood behaviors and trouble focusing on work or school.
5. Take time with your children, spouse, life partner, friends and co-workers to do something you enjoy.

10 Ways to Recognize Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is in many ways a normal response to an abnormal situation. Clearly, the tsunami tragedy and the California mudslides are abnormal. After a tragic event, it is likely that you will experience a variety of symptoms and emotions. Sometimes, however, these symptoms surface several weeks or months after the tragedy. This is called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Recognizing these symptoms in yourself or others is the first step toward recovery and finding appropriate treatment.

1. Re-experiencing the event through vivid memories or flash backs
2. Feeling "emotionally numb"
3. Feeling overwhelmed by what would normally be considered everyday situations and diminished interest in performing normal tasks or pursuing usual interests
4. Crying uncontrollably
5. Isolating oneself from family and friends and avoiding social situations
6. Relying increasingly on alcohol or drugs to get through the day
7. Feeling extremely moody, irritable, angry, suspicious or frightened
8. Having difficulty falling or staying asleep, sleeping too much and experiencing nightmares
9. Feeling guilty about surviving the event or being unable to solve the problem, change the event or prevent the disaster
10. Feeling fears and sense of doom about the future

Memorial Activities at School: A List of "Do's" and "Don'ts" .

Memorial activities can be a valuable way for schools to help students and staff deal with trauma and loss. How a school approaches a memorial can make the difference in the healing nature of the process. Following are a few Do's and Don'ts to avoid further traumatizing students and promote a positive experience. For more information on memorials and helping children cope, go to www.nasponline.org

Do	Don't
<i>Do prepare for the needs of youth both preceding and following memorial activities in the community or school.</i>	<i>Don't underestimate the resurfacing of intense common grief reactions, including sadness and anger.</i>
<i>Do keep parents and staff informed of all upcoming activities related to the memorial plan, and allow any student, with parental permission, to attend a memorial activity.</i>	<i>Don't require all students or staff to attend a memorial activity.</i>
<i>Do provide staff and parents with information regarding possible related behaviors and emotions that students may display.</i>	<i>Don't pathologize normal grief reactions. Conversely, do not minimize serious, atypical grief reactions that may require closer clinical investigation.</i>
<i>Do focus on the needs and goals related to the students, and include parents and community members in activities as appropriate.</i>	<i>Don't try to accomplish all things in the school context; there are multiple forums to which the school staff, administration, and faculty may contribute that do not occur at school.</i>
<i>Do be sensitive to developmental and cultural differences when developing memorials.</i>	<i>Don't assume that "one size fits all" when it comes to developing a memorial.</i>
<i>Do develop living memorials (e.g., tolerance programs) that address the problems that lead to the crisis event.</i>	<i>Don't allow the memorial to be a forum for expressions of hatred and anger toward the perpetrators of crises.</i>
<i>Do something to prevent other crises from happening. Try to move students from the role of "victims" to the role of "doers."</i>	<i>Don't focus the memorial on the uncontrollable aspects of the crisis.</i>
<i>Do emphasize signs of recovery and hope in any memorial activity.</i>	<i>Don't allow a memorial to simply recount tales of the traumatic stressor.</i>
<i>Do allow students to discuss, in small group settings, such as classrooms, how they feel about their memorial experiences.</i>	<i>Don't schedule a memorial at such a time that it will not allow students to discuss or process their experiences.</i>
<i>Do encourage communication (e.g., writing</i>	<i>Don't force students to participate or share</i>

letters and exchange of ideas) related to memorial activities.	feelings and ideas.
Do provide a referral system (school and community based) to identify youth who display complicated grief reactions and ensure appropriate support services are available.	Don't expect that staff and faculty will be able to independently identify individuals in need of mental health assistance.
Do establish an infrastructure (plans and processes) to provide assistance and support to students in immediate need.	Don't anticipate that students will independently seek out the appropriate professional assistance.

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