



Helping Parents Help Their Children: Information about Coping with Trauma

1. Traumas affect us profoundly because they shatter our assumption that the world is a safe and fair place and that if we are responsible enough we can protect ourselves and our children from tragedy.

2. Recovery from trauma means being able to put the experience behind us. For children, this means getting back to the business of being children as soon as possible. Anything adults can do to provide an environment where kids can continue to be kids is helpful in trauma resolution.

3. Children often view traumas in a different way than adults do. They lack the ability to appreciate the longer-range implications of an event, especially if it was a community trauma and their own family was not personally touched. Their view of the trauma is often based on how they see the adults who are close to them responding. Younger children may be more alarmed if the adults in their life may seem very upset and emotional. Conversely, children may be less impacted if the adults in their lives are calm, reassuring, and supportive.

4. Children's reactions to trauma are as individual and different as one child is from another. Some children may have big reactions to small events while others may seem to react minimally to terrible things. There is no one right way for children to react and grieve!

5. Children seem to recover from a traumatic event more quickly than adults. This is often a reflection of their ability to focus on the immediate present rather than on the past or future. This is particularly true if they were not personally touched by the event or witnesses to it. Often, they may be able to put it behind them and move on with their lives in a remarkably short period of time.

6. Children may seem to under-react to a traumatic event. This is because they can only tolerate intense feelings for a short period of time. They experience the upsetting feelings for a brief period of time and then back away from them until they can tolerate the intensity again. So, what may look like denial or avoidance to us is really an example of effective coping. Parents need to take advantage of opportunities to talk about the trauma when their children present them.

Taken from *Managing Sudden Traumatic Loss in the Schools* by Maureen Underwood (LCSW) and Karen Dunne-Maxim (MS, RN).