

Helping Your Child Conquer His/Her Fears

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Do not think in terms of talking to your child. Think in terms of listening to how the traumatic incident has been experienced by your child. What you think your child is experiencing is very likely what you as an adult are experiencing. Children can experience such incidents very differently. You cannot know how your child is experiencing trauma unless you listen.

The following questions can be very helpful:

What worries you the most now?

What upsets you the most now?

What is the worst part, the hardest part for you now?

What helps you feel a little better?

What helps you feel a little safer?

Do you have any questions about what has happened or anything anyone has said?

Reassure your child/teen that they are safe, that you yourself as their parent are also okay by the following:

- Listen.
- Maintain routines.
- Turn the television off or allow children to only watch shows not covering the incident. (Adolescents may need to watch because like adults they have a need to know, but keep it to a minimum – no more than a half-hour and discuss what they saw and heard by asking questions about their responses/opinions.
- Do not criticize any regressive behaviors, their need for comfort food, etc. Allow your children to be sad or to be afraid, but also reassure them that you will take care of them and that their sadness, or hurt, or fear will change in time.
- Encourage your children to exercise some control by making decisions for a few days about what they want to eat, wear, etc.
- Spend time together. This means together, not you in one part of the house while they are in another part of the house.
- Encourage your child to engage in physical activities as well as activities that let them feel better. (Your school is likely involving students in activities to help survivors. Join them.)
- Explain that it is normal to feel sad or worried but that the United States is a strong country and everyone is working hard to keep everyone safe.
- When needed, help separate fact from fiction as fiction tends to escalate one's fears.
- Do not speculate or exaggerate.
- As a parent, let your child see you take care of yourself. Exercise, eat well, and avoid watching too much coverage of the incident.
- As a parent, understand that this is an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of family by spending more time together.
- As a parent it is also an opportunity to teach children tolerance for the differences of others by bringing attention to inflammatory, bigoted, prejudicial comments that generalize an entire culture as terrorists, mad killers, etc.
- As a parent if there are questions your children ask that you cannot answer, be honest. If possible let your children know you will ask others to hear what they might have to say, or simply let your children know that, in life, there are things that happen which we have no answers for.
- As a parent look to your school and/or church to involve your children in proactive activities directed toward helping the survivors, as this helps instill a value for human life.