

## Quick Tips

### Love and Nurture Your Children

- Express your love for your child more than usual, verbally and physically. Give plenty of hugs, even if your child doesn't show outward signs of distress.
- Be sensitive to the fact that your children are greatly influenced by your reactions. Try to remain calm when your children are around you. Tell your children about your own feelings, but consider their age and maturity and be sure not to overwhelm them.
- Be available to your children as much as possible when they need to talk about the disaster. You may want to save phone calls, texts, emails and social media activities for after your child's bedtime so that you can be available to them and so they don't get scared by your strong reactions to the event.
- Remember that of all the things children/people need in times of crisis are opportunities to express thoughts and feelings.
- Focus on your children's feelings and thoughts, without judgment or suggestions. When thinking about how to talk to them, take your lead from them in terms of what they need and what they are thinking and feeling.
- Foster a sense of connection. Stay close if possible. If you must leave, prepare the child well, assure him he will be safe and you will be back.
- Look for signs of anxiety in your children, such as physical symptoms, a change in behavior, a reluctance to go to school, acting out or withdrawing, or increased clinginess.
- Understand that children of different ages need different approaches to help them through the crisis.
  - Children, especially very young ones, are unrealistic and unable to understand complex and abstract concepts.
  - Children are very self-centered and that everything that happens is related to them. Therefore, they believe that they and their families are vulnerable to the remote crises they hear about.
  - Children younger than 7 or 8 tend to think that if something goes wrong, it is their fault. Be sure your child understands that he did not cause this trauma.

### Reassure Your Children

- As much as possible, maintain normal routines; they are reassuring during times of stress.
- Bedtime needs to be calming; allow more time than usual for this transition, if needed.

- Reassure your child that he, your family and community are safe, that you will protect him, and that events like this are rare.
- Give a young child a comforting toy or something of yours to keep (a scarf, a photo, a note, etc.) Your child may be afraid of separating from you; keeping a reminder of you close by may help.
- Encourage discussion or the expression of feelings. Allow anxieties to surface. Let your child know it is normal to feel worried or upset. Supply words if your child has difficulty labeling how he feels.
- Share your own reactions, in moderation and without overwhelming your children with your feelings. Let them know that you share some of their concerns.
- If appropriate to the situation and to the child, talk about safety measures your family and the children's school have in place to keep your child safe.

### **Teach Your Children**

- Limit your child's and your own exposure to media images of the crisis.
- It is up to parents to interpret what has happened. Provide facts, in line with your child's age and level of understanding. Keep your answers to your children's questions simple and age-appropriate.
- As much as you can, keep your children talking about what they are hearing and seeing. Let your child talk about what they think happened and how they are feeling.
- Be patient when he asks the same questions many times over. Children often use repetition of information as a source of comfort and to make sense of what is happening. Try to be consistent with answers and information.
- If older children seem very upset, suggest that they keep a journal of their reactions and feelings about what happened. They can then talk to you about what they wrote, if they want to.
- Younger children can draw pictures and talk about what they drew or they can act out how they are feeling with puppets. You can read aloud from children's books about difficult situations that the main characters have dealt with and survived.
- Find ways for your child and family to become involved in helping activities, such as providing aid to victims, to lessen feelings of isolation, helplessness and powerlessness.
- Teach children that people make mistakes and do harmful things, but being violent or killing people is never acceptable.
- Help children understand that they are good people who would never commit such a destructive act, and that they are certainly not responsible for the disaster (as young children might think).