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| **What Can You Do?**  **Establish safety and security.**   * Provide opportunities for children to receive and give positive physical contact. * Help children get enough sleep. * Help children develop safety plans. * Provide them with physical symbols of love, nurturing, or remembrance.   **Allow children to tell what happened and talk about death and loss.**   * Encourage them to tell or develop stories that help them explore intense reactions. * Talk with them about what they observed from parents, friends, or other adults.   **Provide comfort and ways to cope.**   * Encourage comforting routines. * Provide them with tangible comfort items: a photograph of a loved one, a stuffed animal, or a favorite blanket.   **Help children understand trauma.**   * Help them to solve the problems they face because of the trauma. * Address what can and can’t be done; give concrete information. * Address the reasons for changes in contact with friends or others previously in their lives. * Answer questions honestly using words the child can understand. | **Who Can Help?**  [*Agency*] Victim Services can assist you with information regarding victims’ rights, Crime Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system, and referrals to the appropriate community resources or helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.  **Benefits of Counseling**  Children may benefit from talking to a counselor to help them:   * Coping skills and strategies can help children to continue daily activities and relationships. * Establishing a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological, and emotional effects that often result from traumatic experiences. * In a confidential setting, children can discuss topics such as:   + Safety planning and options for the future.   + The event and how it made them feel.   + Legal and judicial decisions.   This publication was produced under [*Grant Number*] awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this draft publication are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.  [*Revision Date*] | |  | | --- | | **Children and**  **Trauma**  **[*Agency*] Victim**  **Adult Grief and Loss**  **Adult Grief and Loss**  **Services**  **[*address*]**  **[*phone number*]**  **[*Insert Agency logo*]**  **[insert Agency logo]**  **[insert Agency logo]**  **[insert Agency logo]**  Name/ID Number:  Direct Number: | |
| This information on dealing with trauma is provided for you and your family. Please keep in mind that every child reacts differently, and the ages presented are merely a guide.  **Common Responses by**  **Age Group**  **Birth–2 years**  High anxiety levels may result in crying, throwing objects, biting, thumb-sucking, and agitated behavior.  It is unlikely that the child will retain a strong memory of the trauma.  **Pre-school (ages 2–6)**  The focus for children of this age is on their immediate life and concrete needs.  **School-age children (ages 6–10)**  The disruption in routine may cause children to experience a disruption in their own sense of identity and belonging to the world.  Reenactment and play are often used as coping mechanisms.  This is an age when children become more conscious of right and wrong. If they think they have done something wrong to cause what happened, they may feel guilt. If they think others have done something wrong, they are likely to feel anger. If they cannot understand the issues, they may distance themselves from any feelings. | **Early adolescence (girls 10–13, boys 12–15)**  Due to developmental changes, children in this age group often talk about physical stress-related symptoms: nausea, headaches, changes in sleep, frequent crying spells, and so on.  The emotional rollercoaster that a child deals with at this age may be expressed in wide mood swings.  Children become more preoccupied with friends and peers and begin to distrust or challenge adult interpretations of the world. When they perceive adults have failed them, they may be particularly hostile and mistrustful of adults.  Ideals and commitments are viewed as a sacred trust. Children rarely tolerate betrayal of promises, vows, or relationships, even when keeping such promises to the children may be harmful to them. Also, for children, that sense of betrayal might not lessen even if they know that the person making such promises is incapable of honoring them.  Words and symbols mean a great deal to this age group. Stories, plays, poetry, and musical lyrics often act as a basis for expression.  **Adolescence (13–18)**  Adolescent behavior can be inconsistent. Anger may manifest itself as rage, and sorrow may lead to suicidal ideation.  Involvement in risk-taking activities may increase after a traumatic event. Adolescents may express themselves by acting out and by experimenting with new behaviors.  Most adolescents are creative and energetic. Their creativity is expressed through the creation of their own symbols, activities, and words. Many young people create symbolic activities to remember significant events. | **Coping Methods**  Children naturally tend to focus on distress in short time periods and then return to daily activities. They may become overwhelmed with emotions for a while, but other things often distract them.  **Seeking and relying upon help from others**  Children often gravitate to older children or adults who can provide stability and comfort. In addition to parents, children may look for support from other adults in their lives, such as teachers or religious leaders.  **Reduced sense of the future**  Many children who experience trauma have a hard time thinking about their future. This can be a positive coping skill when it helps them focus on the present. It can be a negative coping skill when they believe they may, can, or will die in the near future and express that belief through their actions.  **Retreat into fantasy**  Children often use fantasy as an escape from reality. At times, their fantasies will involve seeing themselves as the savior of the event; at other times, they may imagine a loved one appearing as a superhero.  **Education and aspiration**  Children often cope well because they view the traumatic event as an event to overcome. School and other activities often provide a relief because they are structured, and children know what is expected.  **Spirituality**  Some children may rely on religious or spiritual beliefs to cope when they feel alone or afraid. When a traumatic event involves death, children may believe they are communicating with a loved one who has died. This is not a frightening thought to many children but a comfort as they continue to grow and develop. |