



**I-CART**  
**INDIANA CRISIS ASSISTANCE RESPONSE TEAM**

**Traumatic Events:**  
**Tips for Parents: Helping Your Child Adjust**

Traumatic events affect individuals, families and communities. Children of all ages react differently to the trauma of a disaster and the family and community stress that occurs in the aftermath. Some will seem to come through the traumatic events unaffected. Children who were not directly impacted by the event may experience some of the same reactions as those who were. There may be immediate reactions, delayed reactions, both or no reactions. Others will react strongly from the start even if they have suffered little loss or injury. Other events may result in new fears. Most children, like adults, have normal and typical reactions to abnormal circumstances that accompany a disaster like a death in their community. Children generally experience more anxiety than their parents do or teachers are aware of. They may become easily upset or hide their distress to protect other family members. Many reactions of children are not evident until months after the disaster.

**Common Reactions:**

1. A need to talk about the event and their experiences
2. A need to ask the same question and/or to hear the same answer over and over again
3. Increased physical complaints...headaches, stomachaches, etc.
4. Behavioral changes: difficulty paying attention, focusing; and/or remembering things; irritability; vivid memories that intrude during the day; anger; tantrums, anxiety; withdrawal or isolation; sadness; children and adolescents often regress to behavior from an earlier time period (clinging to parent, wanting to be or sleep in the same room as parent, bedwetting, thumb sucking, crying easily, tantrums, etc.)
5. Sadness and longing for the "way things used to be"
6. Academic performance suffers (falling grades, disruptiveness in class, and rudeness toward adults, falling asleep in class, attendance problems)...this may occur even months after the traumatic event
7. Dreams and nightmares are more common; especially about traumatic events...sleep difficulties.
8. Children and adolescents may show insight and an increasing concern for others
9. Adolescents may lose some of their sense of invulnerability. Especially for adolescents, watch for risk taking behaviors, changes in peer groups, changes in appearance, loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities, substance abuse, hostility and increased irritability, or an increase in "challenging" adult authority

**The intensity of a child's reactions depends on a variety of factors:** the amount of loss experienced, threat of life, the family reactions to the event and the aftermath of the event, financial changes and stress in the home, stress or a troubled home before the traumatic event, the support system that the child has available, previous losses and previous coping mechanisms. Any marked change in behavior, whether immediate or even months afterwards, often suggests a strong need for emotional support. Extreme behaviors also signal a need for intervention (destructive acts toward people, animals or property, frequent panic attacks, an inability or unwillingness to socialize that lasts for several weeks or longer and significantly impacts the child's daily activities, etc). Remember that seeking assistance is a strength not a weakness and it can help prevent a concern from becoming even a larger concern.

## **Tips for Parents:**

1. Provide repeated opportunities for children to talk. Children may need to repeat the stories of their experiences many times...they need to talk about what they saw, heard, felt and did during the days surrounding the event. They also need to talk about what their biggest fear or concern is now. Also, use it as an opportunity to talk about what they learned about their community and how people help each other. Make sure the child knows you are listening to him/her. Young children draw pictures or express their responses in play. Older children may want to journal.
2. Control rumors and correct any myths that children may have regarding the event and reactions to it. People can respond just as strongly to a rumor or myth as an actual event.
3. Reassure your child that many of their reactions are common reactions and that everyone reacts different.
4. Return to your family's daily routines as soon as possible (meal times, bedtimes, birthday celebrations, family outings and favorite activities, etc.). Remind your child of what has not changed and most importantly that you have each other.
5. Do not hesitate to reach out to your child's school to share any concerns or to ask for assistance. Remember that some children do not exhibit significant concerns until months later. Be receptive to any concerns that the school may share with you.
6. Share your grief or feelings about the event. This helps your child express his/her feelings also. Talk about the family plan for coping and recovery and how long it may take. Do not make promises that you might not be able to keep. Help the child accept some losses as permanent. Make explanations simple for younger children.
7. Younger children often express fear and anger through play. Acknowledge their feelings as ok.
8. Hold and comfort your child...adolescents also need this type of support.
9. If your child lost a special possession, allow them time to grieve or cry. Allow the child the time they need to work through this. Remember, what is important to a child may not appear to be that significant to an adult.
10. If your child wants to help others, locally or nationally or to respond in this way to future events, provide them the opportunity and support to do so.

**I-CART**

**317-596-2202    [www.i-cart.org](http://www.i-cart.org)**



## Suicide Prevention Resources for Parents/Guardians/Families



This sheet lists a selection of websites and online information sheets that have suicide prevention resources for parents, guardians, and other family members. The resources provide guidance on talking with your child if you think he or she may be at risk for suicide and on coping with a suicide attempt or death. A few of the resources also discuss how you can take action at the school and community levels to prevent suicide.

### Websites

#### Jason Foundation Parent Resource Program

<http://jasonfoundation.com/get-involved/parent/parent-resource-program/>

This website contains basic information about suicide and how you as a parent or guardian can help prevent youth suicide. It also has a video of a parent and community seminar that includes basic information on suicide and provides awareness and suicide prevention strategies for parents and other adults.

#### Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program

<http://www.maine.gov/suicide/parents/index.htm>

(Look at both the center of the webpage and the links in the left sidebar.)

This website includes a parent-specific section with a number of information sheets that cover basic information on suicide prevention, common reactions to youth suicide, talking with your child, and coping after a suicide attempt or death.

#### Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide

Parent Section: <http://www.sptsusa.org/parents/>

This website's parent section provides information to help you talk with your teens about suicide or the death of a friend by suicide. It includes a link to the video *Not My Kid: What Every Parent Should Know*, which features eight parents from culturally diverse backgrounds asking two experts common questions about youth suicide.

#### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

The Lifeline is a 24-hour toll-free phone line for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. An online chat option is available at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/LifelineChat.aspx>

## Information Sheets

### **Cómo pueden los padres OBSERVAR ESCUCHAR AYUDAR (How Parents Can LOOK LISTEN AND HELP: Youth Suicide Is Preventable)**

#### **Oregon Youth Suicide Prevention Program**

<https://public.health.oregon.gov/PreventionWellness/SafeLiving/SuicidePrevention/Pages/espllh.aspx>

This Spanish-language webpage discusses your role as a parent in recognizing changes in your child's behavior that may indicate he or she is at risk of depression or suicide. It also outlines how you can intervene to prevent a crisis and obtain help. This information can be downloaded as a brochure, and an English-language version can be ordered by e-mail.

#### **National Association of School Psychologists**

##### **Preventing Youth Suicide—Tips for Parents and Educators**

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/preventing-youth-suicide-tips-for-parents-and-educators>

This webpage describes the risk and resiliency factors related to suicide, warning signs of suicide, ways to respond, and the role of the school in suicide prevention.

##### **Suicide Prevention: Facts for Parents**

<http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/Suicide%20Prevention%20-%20Facts%20for%20Parents.pdf>

This information sheet focuses on suicide among high school students and how parents and high schools can help prevent it.

**For information on suicide prevention activities in your state, see SPRC's list of state contacts at**

**<http://www.sprc.org/states/all/contacts>.**

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**Suicide Prevention Resource Center**

Web: <http://www.sprc.org> | E-mail: [info@sprc.org](mailto:info@sprc.org) | Phone: 877-GET-SPRC (438-7772)

**YOUTH SUICIDE: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN**

Suicide is preventable and parents and caregivers make a difference. Parents are often not in a good position to see the warning signs for suicide in their own children. Initially, youth are far more likely to disclose their intent to harm or kill themselves to their friends. However, they then naturally look to adults for help.

**LEARN THE WARNING SIGNS.** Simply knowing the warning signals for suicide can save a life. Be aware of the risk factors for youth suicide as well. (Below)

**TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN.** As parents, this is the most important thing we can do. Be persistent if necessary. Be willing to talk about suicide. Talking about suicide or suicidal thoughts will not push someone to kill him- or herself. Let them know that suicide is not the answer to whatever they are going through. Get professional help if needed or call the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

**RISK FACTORS**

**Pressures** such as unrealistic academic, social or family expectations can create a strong sense of rejection and can lead to deep disappointment. Teens and young adults are especially prone to feelings of loneliness, hopelessness and rejection as a result of these pressures.

**Depression** in young people is increasing at an alarming rate. Recent surveys indicate that as many as one in five teens suffers from clinical depression, and it can be difficult to detect in young people. But it is extremely important that depressed youth receive prompt, professional treatment. Keep in mind that depression in young men often appears as anger, rage, frustration and getting into fights.

**Abuse of Alcohol, Drugs or Sex** is a way that some young people cope with feelings of depression or loneliness. However, such behaviors only lead to new problems and a deeper level of depression.

**Isolation or Withdrawal** can also be a coping strategy for the suicidal youth making them even more susceptible to loneliness, depression and substance abuse.

**OTHER GENERAL RISK FACTORS**

- Mental disorders or substance use disorders
- Hopelessness
- History of trauma or abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide that have a contagious influence
- Lack of social support

**MEANS MATTER**

Suicide prevention experts argue that if deadly methods are not readily available when a person decides to attempt suicide, he or she may delay the attempt. If delayed, it may allow for the possibility of later deciding not to attempt suicide, or using less deadly methods, allowing for greater possibility of medical rescue.

**Preventing suicide by firearms**

*Safe storage of guns is one preventive action that could result in a decrease in the number of youth suicides.*

- Most children older than the age of 7 have the strength to pull the trigger of a firearm, especially a handgun. Keep guns unloaded and locked up.
- Lock and store bullets in a separate location.
- Make sure kids don't have access to the keys for storage/gun cabinets.

- Ask police for advice on safe storage and gun locks.
- Remove all firearms from homes with children and others judged by a physician to be at risk for a suicide attempt.

**Preventing suicide by use of medications or household toxins**

- Keep medications and household toxins locked up.
- Make sure kids don't have access to keys where those products are stored.
- Parents should communicate with physicians so that medications prescribed to youth are effective but not deadly when treating patients who are potentially suicidal.

**MOST IMPORTANTLY, LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS.****WARNING SIGNS**

Most suicidal people give some of the clues and warning signs listed here. By learning the warning signs, paying attention and trusting your own judgment, you can make the difference between life and death.

- Previous suicide attempts
- Talking about, making a plan or threatening to complete suicide
- Withdrawal or isolation from friends, family or school activities
- Changed eating habits or sleeping patterns
- Agitation, especially when combined with sleeplessness
- Giving away prized possessions, making final arrangements, putting affairs in order
- Themes of death or depression in conversation, writing, reading or art
- Recent loss of a friend or family member through death, suicide or divorce
- Sudden dramatic decline or improvement in schoolwork
- Major mood swings or abrupt personality changes
- Feeling hopeless or trapped
- Use or increased use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Chronic headaches and stomach aches, fatigue
- Neglect of personal appearance
- Taking unnecessary risks or acting reckless
- No longer interested in favorite activities or hobbies

**REMEMBER**

Any one of these signs alone doesn't necessarily indicate a person is suicidal. However, all signs are reason for concern and several signals may be cause for concern of suicide. Warning signs are especially important if the person has attempted suicide in the past.

***IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN CRISIS, TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION***

**Call the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline at  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

***Ask. Listen. Get professional help.  
Your actions may save a life!***

Much of the information here is courtesy of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. Visit their website for more information on youth suicide at [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org), or visit SPAN Idaho at [www.spanidaho.org](http://www.spanidaho.org).



