

Guidelines for Understanding and Responding to a Crisis

Here are some of the emotions you may observe in your students (or in yourself) following a tragedy

- ❖ Numbness, shock, denial -- after a sudden death, you won't want to believe it has happened; you had no preparation for this occurrence.
- ❖ Confusion -- Why did this happen? I don't understand the circumstances. How could this happen to someone I know?
- ❖ Fear -- Could something like this happen again? Will something like this happen again?
- ❖ Grief -- Sadness, crying, a deep sense of personal loss
- ❖ Anxiety -- A difficulty in explaining or understanding the tragedy; things are not the same at school or in my class
- ❖ Depression -- emptiness, unhappiness
- ❖ Guilt -- An irrational feeling or responsibility for the event. What could I have done to prevent it?
- ❖ Anger -- Why did someone do a violent/senseless thing(s)? Why did others let it happen? Anger can be directed toward a specific person or persons or be a more general feeling of anger.

Here are some of the changes in behaviors you may see. Most, if not all of these changes, will be temporary. Children are resilient and do bounce back.

- ❖ Lack of concentration -- Inability to focus on school work, household chores, or other leisure activities
- ❖ Lack of interest in usual activities -- Their minds are preoccupied with other thoughts and feelings that would usually be very enjoyable may not have much appeal.
- ❖ Greater dependency -- A need to feel protected may result in their wanting to do more with you or not have you away from them for long periods of time,
- ❖ Problems with sleeping and eating -- Difficulty going to sleep, occasional bad dreams or a decreased or increased appetite are common physical reactions to stressful events.
- ❖ Overly quiet or overly talkative or a combination -- Adults may need to talk about a tragic incident over and over again, asking questions that may be unanswerable but need to ask them anyway. This repetition is often a healthy way of working through the grief process; on the other hand, a student may not want to talk about it much with you, preferring to discuss with friends, classmates, parents- those who may have been closer to the tragedy; or the student may not want to talk with anyone about it.

Here are some things that teachers and parents can do to help a child through this difficult time.

- ❖ Listen -- Don't interrupt, he/she needs to be heard.
- ❖ Accept feelings -- They are valid feelings for this student, even though your feelings may not be similar.
- ❖ Empathize -- Let the child know that you recognize his/her sadness, confusion, anger, or whatever feelings he/she has about the tragedy.
- ❖ Reassure -- The student is not responsible for what happened.
- ❖ Accept -- The student may not want to talk about the trauma right away. Let him/her know you are willing to listen whenever he/she wants or needs to talk about it.
- ❖ Be tolerant of temporary changes.
- ❖ Maintain as much of a sense of routine as possible.
- ❖ Provide additional activities if the students seem to have excess energy.
- ❖ Don't hesitate to ask for help. The help can be sought from other parents, the school staff or an outside professional.