

HOW TO TALK WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT ANY TRAGEDY

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A – AGE APPROPRIATE – Talk with your child in language they can understand. Volunteer only enough information to answer their question, and don't confuse them with too many facts, figures, and detail. Remember that children as old as 12 years of age have difficulty distinguishing between what's real and what's imagined. Given today's movies and media, that distinction is blurring even more. As a result, it's very important to remind and re-remind what's real, and what's not real in an age appropriate fashion.

B – BE HONEST – Do not lie to children. Answer their questions in honest, straightforward language. Remember, children can understand terms like “mean” and “evil.” Also, children – in ways we won't understand – seem to understand the word “dead” and “death” along with the finality it entails, perhaps they understand it better than adults. To that point, do not be afraid to use the terms; however, do not dwell on it. Remember: Children understand death and dying far easier than they understand and cope with a divorce. Don't be afraid to answer honestly, after all, Bambi's mom found it necessary to tell her fawn, “Man has entered the forest.”

C – CONSISTENT ROUTINE – This is the most important of all the A-through-Es – it is very important to get your child back in their routine as quickly as possible – back to school, lunch at the same time, dinner at the same hour, cartoons in the morning, even their favorite breakfast cereal. The reason this is the most important is that a parent's actions toward their child is a far better teacher than any words you may say. Routine says to the child, “I'm safe; I'm secure; all is okay in my family.”

D – DELETE TV – Never forget that 90% of all a child learns comes through their eyes. As a result, television is a teacher of things you may not want your child to learn. The child, when watching TV, is learning even if it doesn't look as if they are. In this day and age of ratings, watching television provides emotional overkill. For TV, showing the bombing once is not the norm. As a result, children, who watch the same thing over, and over, and over, and over find themselves over-worried, over-afraid, and over-confused. It's not necessary to stop watching TV, but cutting back is the rule. When the child is asleep, then parents can watch and catch up on the day's activities. As a general rule, when trauma hits, listening to the radio or reading the newspaper is a way to maintain an intellectual and emotional balance.

E – EXPRESS YOUR LOVE – Remember, actions teach louder than words. It's not unusual for a child to be “clingy” when a traumatic event hits. Allow it. Your hugging-action and expressions of “I Love You,” reduce their fear, worry, and anxieties. Within several days after the event, the clingy-ness will go away, or you can encourage the child to go play.

E – EXPRESS YOUR GOODNESS – Actions speak louder than words. Ask the child, “What can we do to feel better?” “What can we do to help those hurt?” Let the child come up with ways to feel better and to help out. Adults may want to give blood; children may want to draw a picture and send to whomever they select; plant flowers and trees.

E – EXPRESS YOUR FAITH – To get through this lifetime, a spiritual anchor is a powerful coping device. Express your faith, with your child present, through your acts, words, deeds, and prayers. This is an excellent time to attend church or synagogue.

(A-E – Talks to Children, copyright Perry W. Buffington, Ph.D.)

For more reading about Dr. Buff's "behavioral approach" to the world, the following of his books may be of interest:

- *Cheap Psychological Tricks for Parents*
- *Cheap Psychological Tricks: What to Do When Honesty, Hard Work, and Perseverance Fail*
- *Cheap Psychological Tricks for Lovers*
- *The Millionaire Code: Unlocking Your Financial Personality and Making More Money*
- *Your Behavior Is Showing*

All are available at any bookstore, or through his web site www.drbuff.com (click on "Buff's Books").

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