



Au Pair Extraordinaire

For parents who care

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Kids and disaster

▪ **How should parents explain disasters such as the Japan earthquake and tsunami?**

World disasters have been part of what happens to the world for millions of years. We all know the dinosaurs disappeared because of a disaster that happened to the world and new animals developed in place of the dinosaurs. The world grows and develops like people grow and develop and like people hurt themselves and get better again, the world also hurts itself and get better again. Earthquakes and tsunamis are ways the world gets hurt. Another way is when we litter, make too much smoke with cars and destroy trees without planting new trees. Every time a person gets hurt, the person gets attention from other people and through the pain and the hurt the person learns to get stronger and how to deal with pain and hardship. The same for the world and now that Japan is hurting; the country is getting a lot of attention and support from many parts of the world and lots of people are going to Japan to help the people and the country. The purpose of challenges is to help people and countries to grow and get stronger than before.

▪ **Are children likely to become anxious about natural disasters and other news events such as crime reports?**

Children do get anxious, especially when they are exposed on a regular basis to the material on television, without an adult supervising and explaining and containing the information. Parents can use this world event to communicate value life lessons to their children, eg there is no pain without a gain and the pain Japan is feeling equilibrated by the way the world now stands together to support the people of Japan. Japan has now become the centre of attention for most of the world.

▪ **How do you know when your naturally anxious child needs therapy?**

PRE-SCHOOL STUDENTS: Reactions to Trauma

- ✓ Feelings of anxiety, fears, and worries about safety of self and others (more clingy to teacher or parent)
- ✓ Worries about recurrence of violence
- ✓ Increased levels of distress (whiny, irritable, more moody)
- ✓ Changes in behaviour:
- ✓ Increased activity level
- ✓ Decreased concentration / attention
- ✓ Withdrawal
- ✓ Angry outbursts
- ✓ Aggression
- ✓ Absenteeism
- ✓ Increased somatic complaints (e.g. headaches, stomach aches, aches, pains)
- ✓ Changes in school performance



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- ✓ Recreating event (e.g. talking repeatedly about it, 'playing' the event)
- ✓ Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g. sirens, planes, thunder, backfires, loud noises)
- ✓ Statements and questions about death and dying
- ✓ In addition, at home parents may see:
- ✓ Changes in sleep
- ✓ Changes in appetite
- ✓ Withdrawal
- ✓ Lack of interest in usual activities
- ✓ Increased negative behaviours (e.g. defiance) or emotions (e.g. sadness, fears, anger, worries)
- ✓ Regression in behaviours (e.g. baby talk, bedwetting, tantrums)
- ✓ Hate or anger statements

How Parents of pre-school children can help

Avoid exposing your child to reminders of the trauma. This includes limiting your child's exposure to the news and other television programs about the tragedy. If you do choose to let your child see this information on the television, keep it brief, watch it with your child, and talk to your child after to clarify miscommunication. Protecting the children from re-exposure includes limiting exposure to adult conversations about the events- even when you think they are not listening, they often are. Maintain the family routines, particularly around sleeping, eating, and extracurricular activities (e.g. sports, church, dance). Be sure the bedtime routine includes safely tucking them in at night. Young children may want a night light again. Make sure your child is receiving a balanced diet and enough rest. Avoid unnecessary separations from important caregivers. Expect temporary regression in your child's behaviours. Do not panic, as your child is likely to return to previous functioning with time and support. Provide soothing activities, such as reading books, listening to music, taking a walk, riding bikes, etc. Increase patience with your child and with yourself. Give your family time to cope. Find ways to emphasize to your children that you love them.

PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: Reactions to trauma

- ✓ Feelings of anxiety, worries, and fears about safety of self and others.
- ✓ Worries about recurrence or consequences such as war, as well as worries about school violence.
- ✓ Changes in behaviour:
- ✓ Decreased attention and/or concentration
- ✓ Increase in hyperactivity
- ✓ Changes in academic performance
- ✓ Irritability with friends, teachers, events
- ✓ Anger outbursts and/or aggression
- ✓ Withdrawal
- ✓ Absenteeism
- ✓ Increased somatic complaints (e.g. headaches, stomach aches, chest pains)



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- ✓ Discomfort with feelings, particularly those associated with revenge.
- ✓ Increased likelihood to discuss the gruesome details
- ✓ Repeated discussions of event
- ✓ Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g. sirens, planes, thunder, backfires, loud noises)
- ✓ Negative impact on issues of trust and perceptions of others, particularly those that are 'different'
- ✓ Repetitive thoughts and comments about death and dying
- ✓ In addition, at home parents may see:
 - ✓ Changes in sleep or appetite
 - ✓ Withdrawal
 - ✓ Lack of interest in usual activities (e.g. after-school activities, time with friends)
 - ✓ Increased negative behaviours (e.g. defiance) or emotions (e.g. sadness, fears, anger, worries)
 - ✓ Hate or anger statements
 - ✓ Denial of impact

How parents of Primary School students can help

Avoid exposing your child to reminders of the trauma. This includes limiting your child's exposure to the news and other television programs about the tragedy. If you do choose to let your child see this information on the television, keep it brief, watch it with your child, and talk to your child after to clarify miscommunication. Protecting the children from re-exposure includes limiting exposure to adult conversations about the events- even when you think they are not listening, they often are. Maintain the family routines, particularly around sleeping, eating, and extracurricular activities (e.g. sports, church, dance). Make sure your child is receiving a balanced diet and enough rest. Extra time with friends who are supportive and meaningful to him/her may be needed. Avoid unnecessary separation from important caregivers. Provide soothing activities, such as reading books, listening to music, taking a walk, riding bikes, etc. Some primary school students benefit from writing their thoughts and feelings in a journal. Address acting-out behaviour involving aggression or self-destructive activities quickly and firmly with limit-setting. If the behaviour is severe or persists, seek professional help. Increase patience with your child and yourself. Give your family time to cope. Find ways to emphasize to the children that you love them.

For more information visit www.bellavidacentre.co.za

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