

Supporting Children

in the Aftermath of Trauma

How Might My Child React?

- ▶ Losing interest in activities
- ▶ Fear-of dark/personal harm/being alone
- ▶ Attention seeking behavior
- ▶ Sleep disturbances/nightmares
- ▶ Regressive behaviors like bed wetting/ thumb sucking
- ▶ Increase or decrease in appetite
- ▶ Withdrawal or Isolation
- ▶ Daydreaming/ poor concentration
- ▶ Anger outbursts and/or aggressiveness
- ▶ Sadness/crying
- ▶ Makes inappropriate comments about death
- ▶ Headaches/stomach aches
- ▶ Difficulty with school
- ▶ Peer problems

What Can You Do?



Answer the Questions

A year later, children may still have questions. It is often best to ask them first about what they know or what they think the answer is before providing them with the answers.



Give Them Words

As your children try to express their feelings, you can help them by using the characters from the movie "Inside Out" by Pixar or using "emojis."



Listen

Encourage them to talk to you and when they do, listen and validate their emotions. You don't have to fix it, you just have to be present with them in that space.



Hold Them

Avoid the temptation to say "don't cry because it makes me sad to see you like this." Instead, hold them gently and let them cry for as long and as often as they need to.



Write It Out

If they are old enough, have them write out their feelings. If not old enough, have them draw them. You can then ask them about what they want to do, whether they want to keep it, burn it, shred it, share with others, ect.



Include Them In Ceremonies or Activities

You can have them play a small role such as lighting a candle, sharing a favorite memory, giving out food, ect. Author Alan Wolfelt says it best: "if they are old enough to love, they are old enough to mourn."



Create a Memento

If appropriate, help children develop or select an item that brings a sense of safety and/or comfort. It could be something they could wear like a custom bracelet, necklace, a matching shirt, a keychain, or something they can put inside a stuffed animal.

Contact your local Children's Advocacy Center for free counseling options.

Tennessee Child Advocacy Center contact information is listed by county on our website:

www.tnvoicesforvictims.org

This handout was adapted with permission from Orlando United Assistance Center.