

n HELPING CHILDREN
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feel prepared the next time
an emergency situation
occurs.

8) **Talk** with teachers,
daycare providers, etc. so
that they understand how
the child has been affected.

9) **Watch** for repetitive play
in which children reenact
all or part of the disaster.

10) **Praise and recognize**
responsible behavior and
reassure children that their
feelings are normal in
response to an abnormal
situation.

- excerpted with permission,
American Counseling Association
Fact Sheet

A Local Response

All American Red Cross disaster assistance is free of charge, made possible by the voluntary donations of time and money from the American people.

Americans can donate to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund by visiting www.redcross.org or by phoning 1-800-HELP NOW. Contributions to the Disaster Relief Fund may also be sent to our local chapter located at 204 N. Broad Street, Adrian, MI 49221, or you may call (517) 263 - 1904 for more information. n

n RECOGNIZING STRESS IN CHILDREN

(Continued from Page 3)

Hospice of Lenawee and LCMHA are offering a group for children who have been affected by the recent acts of terrorism on our country. "I Feel Better Now!" is an eight session group program for children 6 - 12 and deals with violent and non-violent loss experienced by children.

The effects of trauma in childhood can be found both immediately and long term. Trauma changes those involved. Knowing what to look for in children can lead caring adults to seek professional assistance. For more information, contact Kathy Goetz at (517) 263 - 2323. n

- adapted with permission:
PrepareRespondRecover.com

I Feel Better Now!

Age groups differ in reactions. Of concern to adolescents during/after a major disaster is the fear related to own body (intactness), disruption of peer relationships and school life.

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1040 S. Winter Street
Suite 1022
Adrian, MI 49221

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Special Edition
September 2001



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GRAPEVINE

Special Issue

This special issue of the Grapevine focuses on how to help our children (and ourselves!) cope with the recent disaster in New York City and Washington, D.C. The following web sites provide helpful information:

- www.ces.purdue.edu - tips to parents, teachers and caregivers on how to have meaningful conversations with children about terrorism and other disasters.
 - www.PrepareRespondRecover.org - Recognizing Stress in Children, Safety Planning and Disaster Response and Recovery
 - www.sesameworkshop.org - coping with disaster n
- Also affecting a child's response is his/her developmental age. Preschool children will cling to parents and teachers and will worry about their parents' whereabouts. School-age children whose homes have been damaged by a fire may

Recognizing Stress in Children



A disaster is frightening to everyone. Several factors play an important part in a child's reaction to the event. Children will be affected by the amount of direct exposure they have had to the disaster. If a friend or family member has been killed or seriously injured and/or the child's school, home or neighborhood has been destroyed or severely damaged, there is a greater chance that the child will experience difficulties.

Children are the most vulnerable population. Times of disaster and trauma increase their vulnerability.

Recognizing children's symptoms of stress is not easy. Some stress reactions may include:

- Sleep disorders
- Persistent thoughts of trauma
- Belief that another bad event will occur
- Conduct disturbances
- Hyperalertness
- Avoidance of stimulus or similar vents, i.e., boating, swimming, baths, traveling
- Moving
- Regression, thumb sucking
- Dependent behaviors
- Time distortion
- Obsession about the event
- Feeling vulnerable
- Excessive attachment behaviors

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Crisis Response

Lenawee Community Mental Health Authority is responding in the following ways to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C.

- Have 2 mental health professionals on stand-by with the Red Cross.
- Collecting donations for Red Cross.
- Publishing this special edition of our newsletter focusing on children and trauma.
- Working with local Hospice to offer an 8-session group for children 6 - 12 years of age, using foundational materials entitled, "I Feel Better Now."
- Member of and ready to activate the local Youth Crisis Response Team.
- Member of the Lenawee Critical Incident Stress Management Team and have been advised that this team is on "active on-call" status prepared to report to the scene of the national disaster.
- Working with the Red Cross to provide a support group for family of deployed military personnel.

From The Director

This special issue of our newsletter comes at one of the most difficult moments in the history of our nation. At this time of potential divisiveness and strife, it seems almost frivolous to offer services such as support groups, counseling, or therapy. Nevertheless, it is by pulling together as a community that we will get through this situation.



Executive Director
Roger Myers

For many of us, it is concern for our children that will motivate and direct our behavior in the coming weeks.

Therefore, you will see in these pages a great deal of emphasis on how to approach young people about their fears, and how very crucial it is to listen to them at this time.

We are aware of the special burden likely to be placed on people of Middle Eastern origin, the Muslim faith, or even those who are perceived to be linked to the Arab world. It is our hope that all our readers and the entire Lenawee community will refrain from expressions of prejudice and hatred. In fact, we hope that just the opposite will occur; that all of us, of all faiths and backgrounds, will unite to help our next generation know a life of peace. □

Helping Your Child Cope With Terrorism

- Moina Hassan, MD, Medical Director, LCMHA
- Gracia L. Karmes, ACSW,
Community Outreach Services Manager

In recent days we have fielded many questions from concerned parents, and also from children, on how to cope with the strong negative feelings created by the recent terrorist attacks. Here are some thoughts:

- First, it is very important to **limit children's exposure** to the visual images on television. While the images are everywhere, and are certainly riveting, it is crucial to keep the TV off as much as possible. The images are so disturbing, so indelible, that many (even adults) will be plagued with nightmares and terrible memories for years to come.
- Try to **focus on our need to pull together** as a community. The media offer many examples of how this is happening locally and around the nation. Emphasize the need to not displace anger; to avoid blaming others who had nothing to do with these tragedies.
- It is not nearly as important **what you say** to your children as it is **that you listen to them**. Avoid plunging in with explanations of "what happened"; (it virtually defies
- Children often are not asking complicated ideological questions, but rather have specific concerns such as "Will Grandma be able to fly back home?" **Listen for these rather simple questions** and provide honest answers whenever possible.

Reassure children that our government, and others, are continuing to keep our country safe, and that help is being given to those who need it. Children may benefit from participating in help efforts.

• Finally, despite the positives above, we must recognize that **anger is an inappropriate response** to these cruel happenings. It is OK to express our anger; we cannot control feelings, only behaviors. Things are never going to be quite the same for any of us, precious lives have been lost, and our sense of safety has been rocked. It is our challenge to find ways of channeling and expressing that anger which do not result in more hatred and harm. □

n RECOGNIZING STRESS IN CHILDREN *(Continued from Front)*

Professionals, parents and caregivers can work with child care providers to help them understand that parents under stress may not be able to provide enough love and affection for their children. Some of this lack of affection can be supplemented in child care settings.

There are multiple factors that determine how to negotiate stress with children.

n Child's developmental level

Elementary school children in the developmental stage of accomplishing and feeling competent may not progress well in school. This is an interference in development. Research indicates that the stage of identity development (usually in adolescent and teen years) can be hampered if fear is pronounced.

The most common psychological disturbances found among children who have lived through a disaster include: anxiety disorders, sleep-disturbances, phobias, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder. Children proceed through a variety of stages after a trauma has occurred. The following have been identified as stages one might expect:

• **Terror** - Exhibited through crying, vomiting or bodily discharge, becoming mute, loss of temper, or running away.
• **Rage, anger** - Adrenaline release, tense muscles, heart rate increases.

• **Denial** - Adults may exhibit denial differently than children. Some behaviors include feeling numb, blocking off pain and emotion, dreaming, feeling removed from experiences, or no feelings at all.

Children may withdraw into unaccustomed behavior patterns. One study reported avoidance and resistance to participating in art therapy by not drawing anything related to the actual disaster. Behaviors may appear nonresponsive and be overlooked.

• **Unresolved grief** - could move into deep depression or major character changes to adjust to unresolved demands of grief and trauma. A child may stay sad or angry, be passive or resistant.

• **Shame and guilt** - Children do not believe in randomness and may even feel at fault after a disaster. Shame is one's public exposure of vulnerabilities. Guilt is private. There is a need to resolve these feelings, regain a sense of control, gain a new sense of independence and feel capable.

• **Behavioral signals** The two most frequent indicators of stress in children are behavior CHANGE and REGRESSION of behaviors.

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Helping Children

After any disaster, children are most afraid that the event will recur, that they or someone they love will be hurt or killed, that they may be separated from those they love and be left alone. Here are ways that you can help children cope with trauma:

1) **Allow** children to express their feelings about what has happened and share your feelings with them.

2) **Reassure** children that they are safe and that they are loved.

3) **Be honest** with children about what has occurred and provide facts about what happened. Children usually know when something is being sugar-coated.

4) **Help** children return to as normal a routine as possible.

5) **Spend** extra time with your child, especially doing something fun or relaxing for both of you.

6) **Remember** the importance of touch. A hug can reassure children that they are loved.

7) **Review** family safety procedures so children will *(continued on Page 4)*