

TIPS FOR PARENTS - HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH A CRISIS

- Bring up the topic at a time and place where a discussion can occur. If there are distractions, a shortage of time or if either you or your child is too tired or busy, it is likely the conversation will be interrupted.
- Begin by questioning and listening. Open-ended questions are better than specific ones. It is better to ask *"How are you feeling about what happened?"* than *"Are you scared because of what happened?"* You can be a bit more specific if general questions fail. Let your child tell you what they believe they know, how they learned it and how they are feeling. Don't rush to correct or reassure. Allow them to finish their thoughts.
- Respond to what your child tells you. Their concerns may be specific or general, concrete or abstract, closely related to the crisis or related very little. Address what they are concerned about. Don't overload children with information or solutions. Talk to them with ideas they can handle at their age. If you help them with their concerns today they will likely share more in the future.
- Be aware that new stresses may open old wounds. When a child is confronted with a crisis, losses and upsets from the past may be remembered. The child may, or may not wish to talk about these old issues.
- It is normal for people to try to make sense of things when a serious loss occurs. Allow your child to share his or her ideas and speculations. Help them to separate what they know from what they are guessing about.
- Talk about specific things you can do to make your child feel secure. Go over your home safety plan. Make sure they know that you and other adults will always be available.
- When a crisis hits close to home we all feel vulnerable. Certain tragic events, while extremely upsetting, are statistically very rare. It can be helpful to remember that this type of event is very rare and almost certainly will not happen again in their neighbourhood.
- Children deal with stress in many different ways and at different paces. While your child may not wish to talk today, he/she may wish to talk in weeks or days to come. Do checkups at least once a week until the crisis is over. Follow up discussions may be helpful.
- If you have trouble speaking with your child, get help from family members or people at the school.
- Try to continue normal routines. Reaffirm family goals and spiritual values.