



Burlington-Delphi-Monon-Wolcott

Healing Our Community After Tragedy

By Kim O'Leary, LCSW and Allison Mendoza, LSW

Helpful Suggestions for children, teens, and adults who have suffered a loss through murder:

- Reassure your child of his or her safety. Point out factors that ensure your child's immediate safety and the safety of the community.
- Limit media exposure. Don't allow young children to repeatedly see or hear coverage of a tragedy.
- Maintain the routine. To give your child a sense of normalcy, keep up your family's usual dinner, homework and bedtime routine.
- Spend extra time together.
- Encourage the expression of feelings. Explain that it's OK to be upset or cry. Let your child write about or draw what he or she is feeling. Physical activity might serve as an outlet for feelings or frustration.
- Seek out school resources. If your child's school offers counseling after a tragedy, take advantage of the opportunity to meet with a counselor.
- Do something for those affected by the tragedy. Consider ways that you and your child can help victims and their families. You might take your child to your place of worship or write thank-you notes to first responders.
- Share your anxiety with others in your family. Be open and communicate.

(//www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/helping-children-cope/art-20047029?pg=2)

Healthy Coping

Remember that feelings can be quite intense after a murder. The feelings of shock, disbelief and numbness may mix with anger, guilt and panic. Find helpful ways to cope such as:

writing in a journal; calling someone; walking the dog; exercising; crying; screaming into a pillow; taking a nap; breathing; yoga; ripping up old phone books; throwing bean bags; music; art; writing a letter to your loved one telling them all of your feelings, writing about your anger at the murderer, your regrets for not doing something to save her from this; writing about your sadness about not having him or her in your life anymore, put your letter in the casket or tie it to a helium balloon and let it go; writing a letter to the murderer, expressing all of your pent up anger, rip it up, shred it, burn it or nail it to a board and beat it with a hammer; reading a book about coping with the trauma of murder.

(<http://www.griefspeaks.com/id82.html>)

Do's and Don'ts of Talking to Children About Tragedy

Do: choose a time that your child is most likely to want to talk, such as before dinner, in the car, or at bedtime

Do: ask your child what they already know and what questions they have

Do: tell the truth

Don't: speculate on what might happen

Don't: share unnecessary details

Do: listen closely to your child for misconceptions and underlying fear and anxiety

Do: Remind your child you are there for him or her

Do: Reassure your child what happened is not their fault

Don't: Dwell on the scale or scope of the tragedy

(<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/helping-children-cope/art-20047029?pg=2>)

When to be concerned:

Behavior changes following a tragedy are normal. However, when someone's coping skills become overwhelmed they are at a higher risk to develop anxiety disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks, and acute and post-traumatic stress disorders.

The following reactions may require intensive clinical treatment if they do not subside over the next 30 days:

intrusive thoughts of the event, flashbacks, sleep disturbances, nightmares, night terrors, changes in appetite, increased irritability

425 E. 5th Street, Suite B, Burlington, IN 46915 765-566-5055 FAX: 765-566-5050

901 Prince William Road, Suite A, Delphi, IN 46923 765-564-3016 800-321-5043 FAX: 765-564-2608

420 North Market Street, Monon, IN 47959 877-797-2404 FAX: 877-727-7640
128 W Market St., Wolcott, IN 47995

Affiliated with Purdue University School of Nursing