

## Helping children cope with traumatic stress



After a disaster or traumatic event, children need extra reassurance and support. Do your best to create an environment where your kids feel safe to communicate what they're feeling and to ask questions.

While you should tailor the information you share according to the child's age, it's important to be honest. Don't say nothing's wrong if something *is* wrong, and don't make promises you can't keep.

### Tips for helping children heal after a disaster

- Provide your kids with ongoing opportunities to talk about what they went through or what they're seeing on TV. Encourage them to ask questions and express their concerns. Make it clear that there are no bad feelings.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to admit it. Don't jeopardize your child's trust in you by making something up.
- The traumatic event or disaster may trigger or bring up unrelated fears and issues in your kids. Acknowledge and validate these concerns, even if they don't seem relevant to you.
- Monitor television watching. Limit your child's exposure to graphic images and videos. As much as you can, watch news reports of the disaster with your children. This will give you a good opportunity to talk and answer questions.
- Remember that children often personalize situations. They may worry about their own safety or that of their family, even if the traumatic event occurred far away. Reassure your child and help him or her place the situation in context.
- Watch for physical signs of stress. The symptoms of traumatic stress may appear as physical complaints such as headaches, stomach pains, or sleep disturbances.