

Supporting Children Who Have Faced Trauma



Infants and Toddlers (0–2 Years Old)

Infants and toddlers *cannot* understand that something traumatic has happened, but they know when their *caregiver is upset*. They may start to show the same emotions as their caregivers or they may act differently, like crying for no reason, withdrawing from people, or not playing with their toys.

Children (3–5 Years Old)

At this age children *can* recognize that something traumatic has happened. They may have trouble adjusting to change and loss. They may depend on the adults around them to help them feel better.

What Stress May Look Like and How to Respond

..... INFANTS



Behaviors

Crying more than usual

More clinginess

Difficulty sleeping or
sleeping more than usual

Changes in eating or
bowel movements

What Caregiver Can Do

Reassure as needed and be patient

Keep a positive attitude

Keep routines in care
normal and consistent

Hold and rock more,
be affectionate

TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

Behaviors

Loss of appetite

Cries or screams a lot

May regress to acting younger, for example, wanting a bottle or using “baby talk”

Clinginess

Being more aggressive hitting or pushing



What Caregiver Can Do

Continue to hug and give affection

Pay attention to how they play

Play with them

Supporting Children



Keep Routines Normal

and continue favorite rituals or activities.



Always **reassure children** that you will do whatever you can to keep them safe.



Maintain a “**peaceful**” atmosphere.



Talk about the event when children bring it up- do not try to change the subject. Correct any “false” ideas young children may have about what happened. The language you use and the information you give should always be age appropriate.



Make sure children are eating **regular, healthy meals.**



Limit exposure to the media and adult conversations about the disaster.



Answer any questions children have. Be honest without giving a lot of details.

Help children feel in control

by allowing them to have choices, such as choosing an activity. Choices give them a voice and allow them to be responsible for their actions or decisions.

Teach children ways to calm themselves

like dancing to music, breathing deeply, or doing art activities.

Give opportunities for emotional expression

through activities like playing with playdough, drawing, building, or dramatic play.