

# Helping your child cope with terrorism and war.

Whether or not they feel directly affected by the trials of our post-9/11 world, many children experience some anxiety about their family's safety, and may exhibit a wide range of emotional and physiological reactions. Parents and other caring adults are in the best position to recognize the changes listed on the following pages.



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## How is your child doing?



Fears of terrorism . . .

War on television . . .

Family members or neighbors deployed to the front lines . . .

## Emotional and physiological reactions to stress and anxiety

### Young children (1 - 6 years)



- Helplessness and passivity; lack of usual responsiveness
- Generalized fear
- Heightened arousal and confusion
- Cognitive confusion
- Difficulty talking about and identifying feelings
- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Separation fears and clinging to caregivers
- Regressive symptoms such as bedwetting, loss of acquired speech and motor skills
- Anxieties about death
- Somatic symptoms (stomach aches, headaches)
- Startle response to loud or unusual noises
- Fussiness, uncharacteristic crying and neediness
- "Freezing" (sudden immobility of body)

### School-age children (6 - 11 years)



- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Concerns about safety and preoccupation with danger
- Aggressive behavior and angry outbursts
- Fear of feelings and trauma reactions
- Close attention to parents' anxieties
- School avoidance
- Worry and concern for others
- Changes in behavior, mood and personality
- Somatic symptoms such as body aches and pains
- Obvious anxiety and fearfulness
- Withdrawal
- Regression (behaving like a younger child)
- Separation anxiety
- Loss of interest in activities
- Unclear understanding of death and the causes of "bad events"
- Loss of ability to concentrate at school, with lowering of performance

### Pre-adolescents and adolescents (12 - 18 years)



- Self-consciousness
- Life-threatening reenactment
- Rebellion at home or school
- Abrupt shift in relationships
- Depression and social withdrawal
- Decline in school performance
- Trauma-driven acting out, such as with sexual activity and reckless risk taking
- Excessive activity and involvement of others or retreat from others in order to manage inner turmoil
- Accident proneness
- Wish for revenge and action-oriented responses to trauma
- Sleep and eating disturbances, including nightmares
- Increased self-focusing and withdrawal

# What can you do to reassure your child?

Talking about terrorism and war, in a sensitive manner, will not increase your child's fear. Age-appropriate discussion can instead reassure children about their safety. Parents can help their children by following these tips:

- Create an environment where your child feels safe enough to ask questions, express feelings or just be by themselves.
- Do not criticize your child's feelings or anxieties.
- Provide children with reassurance and extra emotional support.
- Be honest with children. Provide accurate information, but make sure it is appropriate to their developmental level. A discussion should be limited to the depth, pace and range that the child chooses.
- Help children make sense of what they hear from other children and adults. Ask what they have heard and answer questions they have.



- Tell children what the state and federal government, police, firefighters, hospitals and others are doing to promote and ensure safety.
- Serve as a protective shield against the images of traumatic events, particularly those on television. Children should not be over-exposed to the sights and sounds of traumatic events or violent acts.

# When should you seek help for your child or yourself?



Most children bounce back quickly with social support and the aid of their families, but it is important to be aware of the reactions and warning signs listed in this brochure.

If these warning signs are serious or if they persist, you should consider seeking help from a counselor or other behavioral health professional.

Contact your local behavioral health board to find services in your area.

Sources: National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder *Terrorist Attacks and Children* fact sheet and the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration *Coping with Traumatic Events and After a Disaster: Self-Care Tips for Dealing with Stress* fact sheets.

## On-line Resources

Federal Emergency Management Agency for Kids  
[www.fema.gov/kids](http://www.fema.gov/kids)

Disaster Help for Parents and Children  
<http://childadvocate.net/disaster.htm>

Helping Children After a Disaster  
[www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/disaster.htm](http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/disaster.htm)

Coping in Unsettling Times  
[www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/index.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/index.aspx)

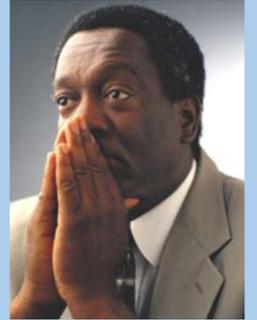
American Red Cross  
[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities  
[www.oacbha.org](http://www.oacbha.org)

Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services  
[www.odadas.state.oh.us](http://www.odadas.state.oh.us)

Ohio Department of Mental Health  
[www.mh.state.oh.us](http://www.mh.state.oh.us)

## How are you doing?



Children pay close attention to their parents' anxieties, so it is essential to be aware of your own reactions and ways to ease the stress you are feeling.

### Signs that adults need stress management assistance include:

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Easily frustrated
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Limited attention span
- Reluctance to leave home
- Depression, sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Mood swings
- Crying easily
- Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone

### Ways to ease stress:

- Talk with someone about your feelings – anger, sorrow, and other emotions, even though it may be difficult.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by staying active in your daily life patterns or by adjusting them.
- Maintain a normal household and daily routines, limiting demanding responsibilities and situations for yourself and your family.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Use existing support groups of family, friends and church.

