



USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP: Talk to Kids After Disasters

This brief Parent Tip is provided at no cost by United Services for Effective Parenting-Ohio, Inc. as a tool to assist parents, teachers, grandparents and all who help to care for and to raise our children. For more information on this and other tools from USEP-OHIO refer to the conclusion of this Parent Tip.

This year, there have been many scary crimes, weather related events and disasters reported in the news near home and all around us. Many parents and teachers have asked, "What should I say to my kids?"

JoAnne, an elementary principal I spoke with said, "There was a lockdown at our school when a convenience store clerk in the neighborhood was shot. Since then we have had problems with disruptive kids, students who seem withdrawn, and a lot of kids with stomach aches coming to the office."

Mom Melanie, whose three-year-old daughter attends preschool, says that she now clings to the teacher, and is telling "tall tales" about how she has been hurt in the halls or the restroom. She says she doesn't want to come to school, and sometimes sucks her thumb.

These are classic reactions after there is a traumatic event that children experience, or hear about. Kids may cling to parent or teacher, become agitated, revert to younger behaviors or act aggressive or withdrawn. School work often suffers, and kids may act disruptive or suddenly try risky behavior like smoking or drugs. Teens often deny they were scared, and feel guilty that they couldn't do much about the event.

I remember when we had a tornado in our town, the kids reacted, and the adults were preoccupied with practical issues and their own emotions. Two children in the school lost their homes. Finally we had a meeting and made decisions to try these things at home and at school:

To reassure the children, we noted the importance of sitting together, cuddling younger kids and giving lots of spoken support. We decided to be honest in answering questions, but not to dwell on the scary stuff. So the talk each day was brief, and upbeat.

We maintained a routine, but added art and play activities that helped kids express themselves. Parents monitored television watching to limit exposure to troubling

reports.

Kids and families were encouraged to:

- Take action - collect toys and supplies for the families who lost their homes
- Let kids talk and discuss fears and concerns, helping them accept their emotions
- Remind kids that each day will get a little better, and that after disaster comes recovery!
- Be open to counseling. Kids and parents fear losing one another and can learn from this.

For more ideas try these: www.samsha.org , www.nasponline.org/NEAT or www.fema.gov/kids