

# Pointers For Parents

## Talking To Children About Tragedy & Loss

(NAPSA)—Parents the world over struggle as they talk to their children about tragedy played out in the news or the death of a loved one. Or a crisis that looms threateningly in the family.

What to say? How to react? What to watch for in the child?

Now parents and caregivers have a unique, fresh resource to help them cope in such critical times: *When Terrible Things Happen*, a new booklet released jointly by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the International Pediatric Association and Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute, L.L.C. It offers simple, practical advice in age-appropriate categories: Infant and Toddler, Preschool, School Age and Adolescent/Teenager.

### **Infants and Toddlers (0-3 years of age)**

Infants and toddlers cannot understand how a disaster has changed their environment. They can, however, recognize and respond to changes in adult behavior. What they need most from parents after a disaster is their usual loving care, according to the booklet's author, Dr. Lewis Leavitt, Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine, and advisor to Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute, L.L.C. "Focus on the familiar and resume normal activities with infants and toddlers," urges Dr. Leavitt. "The games you played and the stories you read before the disaster are still right afterwards."

### **Preschool Children (3-5 years of age)**

Preschoolers may not talk about their feelings even when asked. They still need strong reassurance from parents and family members about their care and safety. Talking while playing games may help children open up and express their thoughts. Dr. Leavitt advises parents to respond directly to their questions. For example, if your child asks, "Do people wake up after they die?" You could answer, "People do not wake up after they die, but it's nice to think about people we like even when they are not with us anymore." Also, it is important to limit television viewing. Young children may think a disaster is happening again and again if they see repeated images.

### **School-Aged Children (5-12 years of age)**

Children at this stage have more interest and understanding of how and why things happen. Parents can help by talking, listening and answering their questions. Honest, direct responses coupled with reassurance are best. For instance, if your child asks,

WHEN TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPEN

A Parent's Guide to  
Talking with Their Children



"Mom, are you sad?" You could say, "I'm sad about what happened, but I'm happy we are together." Again, it is best to limit television viewing or watch together and discuss what has happened. School-aged children benefit by returning to their normal activities and routines.

### **Adolescents/Teenagers (12-17 years of age)**

Teenagers are able to understand the causes and effects of disaster, but most have not developed experience or confidence about how they can or should respond. Their reactions can range from sadness to anger. Parents, friends and teachers can help by letting them know their views and opinions are respected. Teens still need reassurance that parents are there to help and protect them. They may find it rewarding to help others who have suffered harm by working with their families, schools or communities.

### **Behavior to Watch**

Changes in your child's behavior may signal anxiety. Contact your pediatrician if problems such as these persist more than a month:

- Preschoolers: bedwetting, thumb-sucking or increased clinginess
- School-aged children: sleep disturbances, nightmares, poor concentration, aches and pains
- Teenagers: expressions of anger or sadness, problems with eating and sleeping, loss of interest in activities, new difficulties at school

"At different stages of development, children understand the world and how things happen in different ways," says author Leavitt. "*When Terrible Things Happen* helps parents and caregivers respond to their children in a way that is best for each age and stage."

The booklet *When Terrible Things Happen* is available through your pediatrician's office or online at [www.jjpi.com](http://www.jjpi.com).