

# Ministering in a Torn World

*Resources for Christian Educators*



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*Gathered by Sharon E. Pearson, Consultant for Christian Education  
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## **In Their Own Words: Children Speak**

*Mark LaRocca-Pitts, chaplain at Duke University, shares this poem written by a neighbor's 11-year old daughter:*

Does the sun not know the pain we've been through?  
It keeps on rising.

Do the birds not know the sorrow we know?  
They keep on singing.

Do the children not feel what has been done?  
They keep on laughing.

Should we?  
Should we forget what has happened?

No, not yet.

We will still know the pain.  
We will still know the sorrow  
And we will still know what happened,

But

Our life will go on.  
Slowly but surely,  
Our life will go on.

--Gabrielle Steed, Cary, NC, September 11, 2001.†† In memory of the fallen in New York and Washington, D.C.

*From the Rev. Robyn Szoke, Staff Officer for Children's Ministries and Christian Education,  
Episcopal Church Center, New York*

### **Daily Increasing in Peace and Justice**

The Church is Called: To Love, Shelter, Protect, and Defend Children

What might Episcopal church school teachers, educators, and parents do to support their children in their questions, concerns, fears, and awareness of the violent events of September 11, 2001?

As Christian Formation leaders, whether parents, teachers, educators and/or liturgists we are called to remember that each child will respond to the events we are experiencing in different ways. We are at the same time called to lift up the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the midst of grief, and anger, and our own vulnerability. We remember that "I am the Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord. Whoever has faith in me shall have life." (BCP pg. 491) How we respond in our faith to the events will greatly affect how our children respond.

We offer the following suggestions for the home, for church school, for our work to daily increase in peace and justice.

Reflect with other parents, teachers and educators in terms of the religious potential and spiritual capacities of the child, especially in time of such tragedy.

1. Create an environment or time of prayer in the midst of your routine schedule
2. Listen closely to the expressions and concerns of the child
3. Remember favorite Scripture stories
4. Share the prayers for:
  - Care of Children (BCP pg. 829)
  - Times of Conflict (BCP pg. 824)
  - the Human Family (BCP pg. 815)
  - Peace (BCP pg. 815)
  - Peace Among the Nations (BCP pg. 816)
  - Our Enemies (BCP pg. 816)
  - Our Country (BCP pg. 820)
  - Social Justice (BCP pg. 823)
  - Future of the Human Race (BCP pg. 828)

Faith points so important for children:

- The personal and protective love of God
- Relationship of safety
- Parable of the Good Shepherd: Sheep are safe and peaceful with their Good Shepherd; they know there is someone to protect them even in danger
- The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Children offering their prayers
- Children offering their reflections, in art, song, story, poem

For Older Children:

1. Provide reflection time on what they have heard and read
2. Remember Scripture stories
3. Offer Prayers for Peace and Opportunity to Pray Daily Office
4. Action steps that they can take

- \* Connect the children to the response of the congregation
- \* Invite drawings, prayers and poem response
- \* Write letters
- \* Older children talk with younger children

Resources that might be helpful:

Children Praying: Why and How to Pray with Your Children, Joan Bel Geddes, Sorin Books, Notre Dame IN, 1999.

The Shelter of Each Other Rebuilding Our Families, Mary Pipher, Ballantine Books, NY, 1996.

A Call to Peace, Jim McGinnis, Institute For Peace and Justice, Liguori, MO 1998.

Faith Development in Early Childhood, Doris Blazer, Sheed and Ward, 1989.

*From Delia Halverson, a United Methodist educator in Florida.*

### **Needs of Children in a Crisis**

**Love** - They need to know your love, not showering with gifts but physical love.

**Assurance** - They need to have assurance of their own safety, but avoid being overprotective so that they are afraid to leave your side.

**Conversation** - Keep the lines of communication open. Don't spend all your spare time glued to the television. Use such things as selecting pictures in a book to drawing pictures to express feelings. Then talk about the pictures. Take the lead from the child as to how much they need to talk about and know about the situation. Keep answers to questions simple, giving only what is needed. Listen to comments of children as they play - are there clues here that need further conversation?

**Expression of Feelings** - Use opportunities for children to express feelings, such as: toys, puppets, books, music, water play, play dough, painting, puzzles (creating order out of chaos). Let children know that you have some of the same feelings they have. Be honest about your feelings, but temper them with recognition that God loves even those who have harmed us. God doesn't like their actions, but God continues to love.

**Prayer** - Pray as a family. Pray for those injured, those whose family members were injured or killed, those who are making decisions, and also those who planned and carried out such an injustice. Keep prayers simple, simply talking to God. It's OK to tell God about your feelings too. Children may want to write out prayers as if writing a letter to God.

**God's love** - They need to know that God loves with a happy heart and with a sad heart. Right now God is loving with a sad heart. We don't understand why this happened. We don't believe that this was what God wanted or planned to happen. We will never understand why it happened. But we do know that God is sad, not only sad for those whose families were killed, but also sad for the people who planned and carried out these acts. God wanted them to be happy people who loved others, but something went wrong.

[Older children can understand the concept of the three wills of God.]

1. God's Original Will - That we choose to live together peacefully, loving and caring for each other.
2. God's Circumstantial Will - A part of that original will, however, is that we all have our own free will. We are free to choose things that will be helpful to others and things that will be hurtful to others. In these circumstances, some people chose to do things that were very hurtful to others.
3. God's Ultimate Will - If we allow God to work through us, we can become stronger people because of the circumstances that did happen, and we will have a stronger faith (or relationship with God) because we have lived through this.

(Adapted from THE WILL OF GOD by Leslie Weatherhead.)]

When talking about death with young children, play the game, "What's the Really, Really Me?" In this, touch a part of the child's body and say, "Is this the part of you that makes you cry when you are sad or makes you laugh when you are happy?" - Then do the same with other parts of the body. Finally say, "That's the part that doesn't die when the body dies. We sometimes call this our soul."

**Focus** - Children need something aside from the crisis on which to focus their attention. This is a good time to carry out a mission project as a family.

Suggest some local

- ~ mission they may participate in or one of following:
- ~ grow a garden and give food to others
- ~ supply a meal for someone, bake something for someone
- ~ adopt a room or flower bed at church to work on
- ~ plant a tree or care for yard of some older person

**Reality** - Children may have trouble distinguishing between TV shows that blow up buildings and the factual news reports of this event. Yes, this really did happen. It is a sad time, but we will come through it with God's help.

**Stability** - There is something about the routine schedule that makes it settling. This can be an anchor to help the child realize that life can and will go on.

**Quiet times** - In the confusion the crisis, children and adults alike need quiet times.

Some additional thoughts:

Two main questions they're likely to have, whether they communicate those questions or not:

- \* Will this happen to me or to someone I love? (We don't expect it to. You are always loved and have a loving circle of family and friends.)
- \* Why does God make/allow this to happen? (We don't believe that God made this happen - see will of God above.)

A young child cannot understand "We just have to trust in God." They trust in parents and parents protect them. Did the thousands who were killed not trust in God too?

If you remember any fears at time of Kennedy's death, share that you had fears then.

Realize that children may regress in their behavior to get our attention.

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## **A Day in the Valley of the Shadow of Death**

The following guide was created by the UAHC Department of Jewish Education in the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Designed to be used by educators, faculty members, and parents, the materials are divided into age-appropriate units. Please copy, adapt, and use as appropriate in your congregation.

### Introduction

For Early Childhood Settings

For Elementary Grades

For Middle and High School Students

For Educators

For Parents

### **Introduction**

While we do not yet have the perspective of memory, it is already clear that today, September 11, 2001/ 23 Elul 5761, is a horror. The surreal is real. Our assumptions about the nature and meaning of life are terribly shaken. Especially as we approach the Days of Awe, we are tragically reminded that the human capacity for evil will not die. We have the perpetual task of proving that the human capacity for good will be at least as resilient.

In the wake of disaster and destruction, we offer this guided response in order to assist and support you as you, in turn, seek to assist and support yourself, your families, your friends, your colleagues, your faculty, your students and their parents.

The range of reactions to today's acts of violence and terrorism can be as wide for children as for adults. Some may be directly and personally affected. Some may be confused, or angry, or sad, or apathetic. Some may want to talk about their feelings. Others may be obsessed with their feelings. Still others may prefer to internalize their feelings. Respecting the diversity of reactions, we hope the following guidance will prove responsive and responsible.

Questions you may face include:

Am I safe? Is it going to happen to me?

What can we do to help?

Why do people hate?

Why did they do this to us?

What will happen next?

Are we in a war?

How can we defend ourselves?

Will people be angry with me because I am Jewish? With us? (This may require some contextual analysis, e.g., the racism conference in Durban, the relationship between the United States and Israel)

There is no prescribed, categorical answer to any of these questions. Instead, we suggest you consider adopting or adapting a developmentally appropriate, authentically Jewish strategy - LISTEN; ACKNOWLEDGE; SHARE; RESPOND; ACT.

## **For Early Childhood Settings**

The following are suggestions for helping you discuss the tragedies that occurred today in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington D.C. with your young students. Although it is tempting to believe that because of their youth they do not know and cannot understand the devastation that occurred, the truth is that many are well aware that something terrible has happened: they have seen reports on the television; their parents have expressed strong emotions including sadness, shock, and anger; and some have been personally touched. Although we are not necessarily recommend that you initiate a conversation on the topic with your preschoolers, you need to be prepared to help children who come to school confused, upset, and dismayed by the events of the day.

### **LISTEN**

- ★ When a child mentions what s/he has heard on television or at home, give her/him time to talk. Their need to be heard is more important than your need to move on to the next activity.
- ★ Young children speak not only with words, but also with actions. Some common reactions to stressful situations among preschoolers are: thumb sucking, clinginess, changes in appetite, loss of interest in preferred activities, and aggression. If you notice these changes in a child, you may want to open up a conversation by saying "Many children are thinking about what happened in New York and Washington yesterday. Have you been thinking about it?"

### **ACKNOWLEDGE**

- ★ Let children know they have been heard. Repeat what you have heard them say to you.
- ★ Name the emotions children are expressing whether verbally or through their actions.
- ★ Ask, "Are you worried that something like that might happen here?"
- ★ Remember that all feelings are valid. While a child's response may not make sense to us, we need to validate it as true for the child

### **SHARE**

- ★ Tell children that you share their feelings.
- ★ Explain what happened in very simple words. Correct any distortions or inaccuracies the child may have.
- ★ Let children know that they are safe at school.

### **RESPOND**

- ★ Create safe outlets for children to express strong emotions. These may include: additional playtime outside, opportunities to work with clay or play dough, time to draw and color, and water play.
- ★ Maintain your routine. Routine makes children feel safe. However, it is equally important to be flexible enough to respond to the needs of the children.
- ★ We advise that you not provide constant media exposure to the children. Although watching the news or listening to radio broadcasts may be comforting to you and the other adults in the setting, it is disturbing to young children.
- ★ In the same spirit, we suggest that you not allow this tragedy to overwhelm your normal day. Children, unlike adults, experience strong emotions in fits and starts, rather than as a constant. When a strong emotion overwhelms them, they cope by turning the emotion off for the time being. Spending time as a group discussing the terrorist acts will overwhelm children. Rather, you need to be available to discuss the incidents with individual children when they are ready.

## ACTION

- ★ Provide an opportunity for children to make cards for individuals who have suffered losses as a result of the terrorist acts.
- ★ Organize a collection to help families who have been affected.
- ★ Teach children that they have the power to make a difference by allowing them to dictate letters responding to the incidents and mailing them.

## For Elementary Grades

Teachers, educators, rabbis and parents have a very special opportunity to help students articulate and address the fears and concerns that are a natural response to the terrorist attacks against the United States. Our goal is to provide a forum for the sharing of feelings that can be directed toward constructive, life-affirming action. Here is a possible way to achieve this outcome:

## LISTEN

- ★ Make time for discussion so that each student can have an opportunity to express his or her thoughts or feelings. Because children (and adults!) can sometimes ridicule one another's remarks, it is important to establish guidelines that will create a safe framework for open sharing. This can be achieved by gaining agreement that no one will comment on anyone else's remarks, except to restate for clarity and understanding. (For example, Joanne might say, "I think Martha means that war is bad no matter what." Martha then has an opportunity to confirm or alter that understanding.)
- ★ It is possible that some students will feel uncomfortable speaking about difficult feelings in a larger group. In such cases, it might be beneficial if the teacher could invite the student(s) to speak privately at a specified time in the near future. Alternatives might be for the student to speak about his or her feelings with a friend, or to record them in a journal, which could then be shared with the teacher or someone else, if the student so chooses.

## ACKNOWLEDGE

- ★ After the group sharing discussion, the teacher might want to generally restate the feelings expressed by the group. This helps children understand that their thoughts and comments are taken seriously, and hearing the teacher gently restate their words can be a very affirming and self-esteem building experience. It is especially important to treat each person's comment with understanding and respect, thereby letting students know that there are no "right" or "wrong" feelings-each individual's response is valid. This approach can provide an important model for the students in their future conversations and interactions with others.

## SHARE/RESPOND

- ★ Here is an opportunity for students to be given a glimpse of the deeply feeling aspect of their Jewish teacher's nature. Just as students have taken a risk in speaking openly about their feelings and fears, so the teacher must respond by sharing his or her own feelings, stated from an adult perspective in a way that can reassure, rather than unsettle. This moment also presents teachers with the opportunity to discuss with their students the Jewish way of dealing with intense and potentially dangerous feelings like anger. While we don't deny or ignore them (as the foregoing classroom discussion has, no doubt, just illustrated), we do work to master them so that they are not destructive or harmful to others or to ourselves. The teacher might ask the students for their suggestions about how anger can be managed, based on their own experiences or their observations of others.

## ACTION

- ★ Teachers might want to discuss with the class ideas for helping to repair the damage and ease the pain brought about by the recent terrorist acts. These might include creating get-well

cards for victims injured in the attacks or organizing tzedakah projects to help raise money for the victims or for rebuilding.

### Looking Ahead - Spiritual Renewal

Perhaps teachers and students could create their own healing service as a way of making room for God's presence in their hearts, after the images of so much violence and hatred. The service could include such elements as Debbie Friedman's Mi shebeirach prayer; Psalm 23 (The Lord is My Shepherd); individual prayers or poems written by students; and possibly inspirational quotations from such sources as *Day by Day: Reflections on the Themes of Torah*, edited by Chaim Stern.

Finally, the lesson of how we conduct ourselves in a world over which we have limited control is an important High Holidays message for both children and adults, and one that works throughout the year. As we approach Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, let us strive to provide comfort, support, and healing to our students, to our loved ones, to our community, and to our nation.

### For Middle and High School Students

#### LISTEN

- ★ Allow your students to express their reactions, opinions, fears, anger, confusions and suggestions. The best teachers are master learners, who listen in order to discern the underlying questions and the overarching themes. You may choose to take notes and make it clear that all of you are learners. None of us possesses absolute truth or wisdom. We are all humbled and diminished in the immediate aftermath of terror.

#### ACKNOWLEDGE

- ★ Students may need to hear from you that their feelings are valid, and that their concerns are real. You may not share each one of them or feel them as deeply, but for example, the reactions of the Jews to the destruction of the Temple ranged from suicide to apostasy to separatism to migration to subversion to appeasement. Rather than judge our students, on matters of life and death, we can support and legitimize their questions and their emotions.

#### SHARE

- ★ Encourage your students to voice their ideas with complete freedom from critique, by the teacher and the other students. Students may share other trauma that they associate with this one. You can learn a great deal about the character of your students from the stories they choose to tell. Some students may prefer to write down their feelings and share it with you. You benefit from as many inputs as possible, so seek to elicit some expression for each one of your students, especially if you live in an area in which you have felt the direct impact of victims. The fact that all of us are engaged in this process together makes a compelling statement. Safety and togetherness are positive, binding forces at all times, but especially when we are vulnerable.

#### RESPOND

- ★ We are not powerless, as individuals or as a people. The way we treat each other has cosmic implications. How do we express anger? How do we engender hatred? What are some antidotes to evil? How do we engage in self-defense? By considering these and similar questions in microcosm, you are creating the context for a constructive, controlled reaction precisely at a time when there can be a proclivity for destructive, uncontrolled behavior. Precisely when we are shaken to the core of our being and knocked off our pinions, it is the time we need to draw on our reservoir of humane behavior. As Jews, we may have unique

questions about our ability to empathize with Israel, with the sense of being under siege, waiting for the next act of terror, hoping that people we love will not visit the 'wrong' restaurant. How can we respond as Americans and as Jews to terror?

#### ACT

- ★ Brainstorm specific actions in response to terror. Consider writing condolence cards to victims' families, collecting tzedakah, writing a service to commemorate the victims, writing letters to Israeli schools learning about how they cope and what they have learned from their experiences, give blood (if eligible)Ö These possibilities for action demonstrate that hatred does not have to engender further hatred and that all it takes for evil to triumph is for people who are good to do nothing.

#### **For Educators**

Your faculty will need you - your presence and support. Make a special effort to be together with them. All them to listen, acknowledge, share, respond and act. Let them know that they can turn to you and the other professional staff for help, not as experts necessarily, but as other adults and considerate colleagues. Let them know that individual students may need individual attention and that you will do everything possible to provide it. Please share this guide with them and offer to contact appropriate professionals, if the needs go beyond the capacities of your institution.

#### **For Parents**

Your children, perhaps more than anything, will read your reactions and react to them. You may be glued to the television in order to be completely up to date. But, your children need you to spend time with them, to reassure them that you love them, that they are not alone, and that you are there for them when they need you. There is no substitute for being with people you love and who love you. The rhetoric of safety and togetherness pales by contrast to the power of actual safety and togetherness.

#### *Listen to your children*

- ★ Allow children to express their feelings and concerns. Children will respond differently to these events. Although a child's response may be difficult to listen to, and sometimes difficult to understand, it is important to validate his/her feelings. Children, particularly young children, may act out their feelings rather than verbalize them. Encourage verbal expression.
- ★ Allow your child to ask questions. Answer their questions as honestly as you can. "I don't know" is a perfectly acceptable response. Only answer the questions they have asked; it is better for a child to have to ask another question than to hear more than they are prepared for. Children may have many misperceptions in their understanding of the events. Correct them.
- ★ Acknowledge the magnitude of what has happened
- ★ In the face of a tragedy such as the one that has occurred, there is a great sense of uncertainty. We do not know what will happen, but we know that life in the United States will not be the same again. Reassure your child that while this is true, much in his or her own life will stay constant: you will continue to love and care for them; they will continue to attend school and synagogue; the disruption in their lives will be minimal.
- ★ Share your own feelings with your child
- ★ It is reasonable to express your own thoughts and feelings in order to validate your child's feelings. However, your words carry great weight with your child. It is important to think carefully before speaking thoughts or feelings that could further upset or confuse your child. Powerful feelings can be scary to your child, but it is necessary for your own mental health to

express them. Be sure to make time to talk and share with another adult away from your children.

*Respond in ways that will promote your child's well being*

- ★ In these uncertain times, it is particularly important that we put high priority on our children's needs. Children need to have routine in their life. While it is tempting to relax rules, change our expectations, and otherwise alter our daily life in response to a life-altering event, this is ultimately harmful to our children. While we must acknowledge that our world has changed, we also must do everything within our power to ensure that our children's immediate world stays as constant as possible.
- ★ Much has been said about the impact of the media on our children. Right now the television is full of horrific pictures and frightening words that are difficult for all of us to understand. Young children should be shielded from the television to the extent possible. Older children can watch the news but should do so with an adult, who is prepared to discuss the events, respond to the child's questions, and comfort the child.

*Help your child take action*

- ★ Although we may feel powerless, we are commanded to take action. Taking steps to heal those affected by this tragedy will help you and your child feel more in control. Younger children can draw pictures, while older children can write words of healing and comfort. Participate in local efforts to send help to those who have been affected. Pray. Many synagogues will have special prayer services which you and your child can attend together.

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*From Children at Worship ~ Congregations in Bloom*  
*The Reverend Caroline Fairless*

### **From the Staff of Children at Worship – A Response Activity**

We, like you perhaps, wander about our day in a fog born of horror and fear and disbelief. Perhaps there is anger, but we can't yet touch it. Hope, but it seems out of reach. We look at our work load for the upcoming week and feel so very small and insignificant. We say, perhaps like you, what good, this?

*Holy God we are powerless in so many ways. Help those whom we cannot reach. Bring comfort to those who seem beyond consoling.*

*Give us courage to hold fast to our vision of union and peace, the vision of building inclusive community. Show us the value of taking one step, small though it may seem, and then another step.*

*Give us courage to trust and to release ourselves to your unfailing love.*

*Amen*

In light of Tuesday's, Sept. 11, 2001, events, CAW would like to offer an "**Optional Weekly Feature**". This is an intergenerational art project that is designed to address the need to express and articulate the horror and fear and rage in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and elsewhere. It's a project that can continue and evolve over time, as the concerns of the community evolve.

It needs to be big. We suggest a wall. If you don't have or don't want to designate a wall for this purpose (parish hall, kitchen, sanctuary, anywhere people gather), then consider hanging panels of cardboard. Panels that are perhaps the four feet by eight feet.

Start with two, symbolizing the Trade Center Towers. Hang them (after the painting process, as described below is complete) as you would a painting, with wire or string, or fishing line, from a molding. Hooks from the ceiling and thin chain would do. Hang them out a bit from the wall itself. (You could also purchase wardrobe boxes from U-Haul, designing this project in the round.)

Gather your group, after church, during the education hour, one evening this week.

Sit or stand in prayer. Remember, silently or aloud, the images you've seen over the days since the collapse of the Towers and the destruction of the Pentagon. Remember those you love, and those you don't even know who have lost loved ones. Remember those who don't yet know.

Paint the cardboard a solid color.

Then make paints (tempuras, finger paints, even acrylics), fabric and glue, glitter, markers, pens and whatever other materials you have on hand, available to all the people.

Ask them to paint a collage of color, colors representing feelings. Have them write questions of God, questions of each other. Ask them to identify and articulate feelings. Suggest that they ask each other for help in expressing deep feelings.

Fill up the cardboard. Perhaps this will take one Sunday, perhaps two or three.

Then, in Church, during Prayer Time or before a service begins, ask people to write their prayer offerings on index cards. Prayers for the victims. Prayers for their families and friends. Prayers for the medical community. Prayers for stability. Prayers for peace. Ask people to articulate the prayer concerns of their hearts, with words, or pictures.

Fold the cards twice, in half, and then in half again. And in the cardboard hangings, make slits with a knife, slits an inch apart. You can make rows and columns or do it randomly. It doesn't matter. Insert the folded prayer cards.

You have made a prayer wall. You might put a prayer box at the foot of the hangings, to collect prayers for the week, and then add them on Sunday as a prayer ritual during the service.

Think of the many different ways you could do this project so that it becomes meaningful in your own community. Adapt it in whatever way makes sense.

Continue to add to this wall. Consider inviting your wider (town, city) community to a special prayer service, and make the prayer wall available.

*Source Unknown*

### **Prayer String**

*Some of us who pray for world peace, with an awareness that we are bound together with people all over the globe, are wearing prayer strings that help us pray for peace and a weaving together of all humanity in peace and justice. Here is how to make a prayer string:*

*Take a white (or whatever color you wish) string or yarn (they have multiple strands), cut about a 6" piece and tie a knot in the middle. Put a pin into it and pin it on your clothing or backpack, etc. It will be somewhat unraveled as time goes on, but perhaps that is how we are (and we pray that God may involve us in the weaving of humanity together). Some are braiding the string and/or tying knots at the ends to prevent unraveling or as they see weaving together happen. Do your own prayerful interaction with the string.*

*This is simple to do and we encourage you to encourage others to join in this prayer weaving. You may want to prepare some extras to share with others as they ask you about it.*

“Bind us together, Lord,  
Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.  
Bind us together, Lord. Bind us together, Lord.  
Bind us together in love.” (a portion of Bind Us Together from THE FAITH WE SING.)

Shalom

## **Helping Youth**

### ***Reactions by Youth***

#### *Jr. High vs. High School:*

Jr. High-ers may be quite overwhelmed and may not really want to talk about it, particularly boys. They begin acting out a bit, acting nervous or anxious. They may seem less mature than usual. They may numb out. They may (particularly boys) have a lot of bravado/macho talking about kicking ass and so forth. High School-ers are more likely to want to discuss it, to analyze and to talk. Older high school boys may be concerned about the draft. High school-ers are reacting emotionally- but as time passes will begin to process more cognitively.

### **Grief & PTSD**

We know a lot about grief and its stages and processes. We also know a lot about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Both of these phenomena will give us information about what to look for and expect. Find a book or resource on both to refresh your memory on those processes. Kids that have experienced trauma or loss in the past are more vulnerable and may have more intense reactions.

### **Common Reactions**

You can expect a wide range of reactions including:

Fear/ Horror

Anger, Blame, Vengeful thoughts and feelings

Sadness & Grief

The desire to flee or get away

Numbness

Avoidance

Different than Columbine and school violence stuff. With Columbine, kids could identify with both the victims and to some extent the perpetrators, and in that way "understand" what happened. With this experience, it is so totally alien that there is no real way to understand it.

### **Other Reactions**

*Schools.* Some schools will talk with kids, some won't. School reaction is likely to be largely "function" oriented. Lets make cards, or send socks or have a food drive. That sort of thing.

Some schools will have more of a process. Most public schools are not likely to address theological or faith issues.

*Parents.* Kids parents may be all over the board on this. They may be hearing a lot of peace talk or a lot of vengeance talk. Parents will have varying level of skill and may not know what is appropriate to talk about. They will have varying degrees of personal coping skills. You can help parents by providing age appropriate resources and by being a sounding board.

*Friends.* Again all over the board. Help the kids have meaningful, supportive, loving interaction with their peer group. This could be extremely valuable at this time and we are in a unique position to do so.

### **Our possible reaction**

If you are having EYC/ J2A this Sunday or a special meeting, here are some suggestions:

1. Look at 1-2 hour time frame. Include dinner or a meal. (Grounding experience).
2. Try to stick to the time frame, otherwise it could be exhausting. Don't let it drag on to long, but allow some flexibility to go long if kids need to talk and the process is good.

3. Have a mental health professional present (or two or three depending on the size of your group). In NO circumstance should one adult attempt to do this alone.
4. Depending on your clergy it may be or may not be good to have them there. Are kids comfortable with this person? Will it stifle the conversation about God rather than bring it out. Will the clergy claim to have "answers"? A lot to think about here. If kids know and love their clergy and the clergy can field theological questions and issues skillfully (without lecturing, having "right" answers and so on) then it would truly be a blessing to have them there.

**Things you might include at the meeting.**

1. Go around the circle of kids. Allow each to speak with the option to pass. Ask them to talk about how they are feeling, and what they are thinking about the situation. Comments are prohibited. THERE SHOULD BE NO CROSS TALK, DISCUSSION OR INTERRUPTIONS. Let them say whatever, uncensored. Furiously scribble down all that they say on an easel or chalkboard. This honors each of them. You may want to organize your scribbles into categories of reactions (Fear/Anger/Sadness/Numbness-Avoidance/ Other as well as "thoughts") This is up to you. Expect some strange responses.
2. Prayer
3. Bible readings (but I wouldn't attempt a big academic discussion or "bible study") Use bible to raise questions and stimulate discussion.
4. Discussion:  
You can expect many theological issues to be raised and you need to be prepared. A suggested resource is "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People" by Rabbi Kushner. (A quick, short read) This will help you get into the right frame of mind when the kids hit you with a zillion questions.
5. Be sure to include guidelines and ground rules for the discussion. (Respect others opinions, feelings are OK. Anger is OK, but should not be used to intimidate others. One person talks at a time- stuff like that)

**A word about feelings:**

Feelings are gifts from God. ALL of them are OK. Feelings just ARE. You have feelings and feelings should be allowed. Feelings provide us with information about what is going on inside us. In a way they are God talking to us, giving us information about who we are and what is going on within us. They are treasures, no matter how painful or unpleasant. What we DO with our feelings, how we ACT OUT our feelings is what counts. It is here that we can chose to shape the world according to God's purpose or to be destructive and separate ourselves from God.

**Possible Theological Issues to Be Prepared for:**

- Is God punishing the United States?
- How can God allow this to happen?
- Is God really in charge and all powerful?

**Issues relating to Freewill**

- ★ Issues relating to the nature of evil. (See next paragraph)
- ★ What about people who are followers of Islam? What do they believe? How do we treat those people, what do they believe? Are they going to hell cause they aren't Christian? What separates main stream Muslims from fanatical ones. Possible analogies to Christian radicals.
- ★ What is the difference between justice and vengeance?
- ★ The law of the prophets VS the great commandment.
- ★ Why as Christians do we have trouble attacking back? Do we? What does Jesus say about all this?
- ★ Where does Jesus fit into all this? Is there redemptive justice? Is there transformation?

- ★ I would suggest staying away from answers, but use scripture to stimulate discussion. However, really scary bad theology might be headed in a new direction with a few gentle statements from you.

### **Talking about Evil**

It might be helpful to break evil down into parts and make some distinctions. You may or may not agree with this, but here it is anyway.

- ★ *The Evil One. AKA Satan, the devil.* We know that there is evil in the world. This is a big concept. Very difficult to get your head around and very scary.
- ★ *Evil Ones:* People to kill for no reason. People who do horrible acts for no reason. These people do exist, however there are very few of them. Scary- but less so.
- ★ *Evil Acts:* Acts of evil done by human beings who are both good and evil. These acts are horrible, destructive and violent. That is what we have here. In the context of their belief system this evil act made sense to the perpetrators. They had crazy distorted thinking. Who knows what went into the making of their psyche- but it made sense to them and in their mind they had good reasons for doing what they did. By putting this tragedy in the third category kids can begin to comprehend and "understand" how something this horrible might happen. It will quell fears about the end of the world and that sort of thing. It also begins to open the door to forgiveness if we can see them as human. (Forgiveness seems a long way off)

**Helping Children Cope With Tuesday's Acts of Terrorism:  
Tips for Parents and Teachers**

Tuesday's tragic acts of terrorism are unprecedented in the American experience. Children, like many people, may be confused or frightened by the news and will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children cope first and foremost by establishing a sense of safety and security. As the nation learns more about what happened and why, adults can continue to help children work through their emotions and perhaps even use the process as a learning experience.

**All Adults Should:**

1. Model calm and control. Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid appearing anxious or frightened.
2. Reassure children that they are safe and so are the other important adults in their lives. Explain that these buildings were targeted for their symbolism and that schools, neighborhoods, and regular office buildings are not at risk.
3. Remind them that trustworthy people are in charge. Explain that the government emergency workers, police, fireman, doctors, and even the military are helping people who are hurt and are working to ensure that no further tragedies occur.
4. Let children know that it is okay to feel upset. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy like this occurs. Let children talk about their feelings and help put them into perspective. Even anger is okay, but children may need help and patience from adults to assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
5. Observe children's emotional state. Depending on their age, children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of grief, anxiety or discomfort. Children will express their emotions differently. There is no right or wrong way to feel or express grief.
6. Tell children the truth. Don't try to pretend the event has not occurred or that it is not serious. Children are smart. They will be more worried if they think you are too afraid to tell them what is happening.
7. Stick to the facts. Don't embellish or speculate about what has happened and what might happen. Don't dwell on the scale or scope of the tragedy, particularly with young children.
8. Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate. Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that the daily structures of their lives will not change. Upper elementary and early middle school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Upper middle school and high school students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. They will be more committed to doing something to help the victims and

affected community. For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!

### **What Parents Can Do**

1. Focus on your children over the next day or so. Tell them you love them and everything will be okay. Try to help them understand what has happened, keeping in mind their developmental level.
2. Make time to talk with your children. Remember if you do not talk to your children about this incident someone else will. Take some time and determine what you wish to say.
3. Stay close to your children. Your physical presence will reassure them and give you the opportunity monitor their reaction. Many children will want actual physical contact. Give plenty of hugs. Let them sit close to you, and make sure to take extra time at bedtime to cuddle and to reassure them that they are loved and safe.
4. Limit the amount of your child's television viewing of these events. If they must watch, watch with them for a brief time; then turn the set off. Don't sit mesmerized re-watching the same events over and over again.
5. Maintain a "normal" routine. To the extent possible stick to your family's normal routine for dinner, homework, chores, bedtime, etc., but don't be inflexible. Children may have a hard time concentrating on schoolwork or falling asleep at night.
6. Spend extra time reading or playing quiet games with your children before bed. These activities are calming, foster a sense of closeness and security, and reinforce a sense of normalcy. Spend more time tucking them in. Let them sleep with a light on if they ask for it.
7. Safeguard your children's physical health. Stress can take a physical toll on children as well as adults. Make sure your children get appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition.
8. Consider praying or thinking hopeful thoughts for the victims and their families. It may be a good time to take your children to church or the synagogue, write a poem, or draw a picture to help your child express their feelings and feel that they are somehow supporting the victims and their families.
9. Find out what resources your school has in place to help children cope. Most schools are likely to be open and often are a good place for children to regain a sense of normalcy. Being with their friends and teachers can help. Schools should also have a plan for making counseling available to children and adults who need it.

### **What Schools Can Do**

1. Assure children that they are safe and that schools are well prepare to take care of all children at all times.
2. Maintain structure and stability within the schools. It would be best, however, not to have tests or major projects within the next few days.
3. Have a plan for the first few days back at school. Include school psychologists, counselors and crisis team members in planning the school's response.

4. Provide teachers and parents with information about what to say and do for children in school and at home.
5. Have teachers provide information directly to their students, not during the public address announcements.
6. Have school psychologists and counselors available to talk to student and staff who may need or want extra support.
7. Be aware of students who may have recently experienced a personal tragedy or a have personal connection to victims or their families. Even a child who has been to visit the Pentagon or the World Trade Center may feel a personal loss. Provide these students extra support and leniency if necessary.
8. Know what community resources are available for children who may need extra counseling. School psychologists can be very helpful in directing families to the right community resources.
9. Allow time for age appropriate classroom discussion and activities. Do not expect teachers to provide all of the answers. They should ask questions and guide the discussion, but not dominate it. Other activities can include art and writing projects, play acting, and physical games.
10. Be careful not to stereotype people or countries that might be home to the terrorists. Children can easily generalize negative statements and develop prejudice.
11. Refer children who exhibit extreme anxiety, fear or anger to mental health counselors in the school. Inform their parents.
12. Provide an outlet for students' desire to help. Consider making get well cards or sending letters to the families and survivors of the tragedy, or writing thank you letters to doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals as well as emergency rescue workers, firefighters and police.
13. Monitor or restrict viewing of this horrendous event as well as the aftermath.

For information on helping children and youth with this crisis, contact NASP at (301) 657-0270 or visit NASP's website at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)

NASP represents 22,000 school psychologists and related professionals throughout the United States and abroad. NASP's mission is to promote educationally and psychologically healthy environments for all children and youth by implementing research-based, effective programs that prevent problems, enhance independence and promote optimal learning. This is accomplished through state-of-the-art research and training, advocacy, ongoing program evaluation, and caring professional service.

National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway,  
Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814, (301) 657-0270, Fax (301) 657-0275

*From the Children's Defense Fund: Child Care Advocacy Newsletter, Special Edition:*

### **Resources for Talking with Children About the Tragedy**

These are general resources that can be used by parents, teachers, and other caregivers to help children through these difficult days.

Some general advice from the experts includes:

1. Continuously reassure your children that you will help to keep them safe.
2. Turn off the TV. Overexposure to the media can be traumatizing. If your older children are watching the news, be sure to watch with them.
3. Be aware that your child's age will affect his or her response. Adolescents in particular may be hard hit by these kinds of events. Obtaining counseling for a child or adolescent soon after a disaster may reduce long-term effects.
4. Calmly express your emotions, but remember that a composed demeanor will provide a greater sense of security for your child.
5. Give your children extra time and attention and plan to spend more time with your children in the following months.
6. Let your children ask questions, talk about what happened, and express their feelings.
7. Play with children who can't talk yet to help them work out their fears and respond to the atmosphere around them.
8. Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing and going to bed to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.
9. Consider how you and your child can help. Children are better able to regain their sense of power and security if they feel they can help in some way.

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*From the National Association for the Education of Young Children:*

As all of us struggle to deal with the tragic and terrible events of September 11, it's important to recognize how young children may be especially affected by these terrorist acts. Parents and others who care for young children need to provide comfort, reassurance and stability.

When children witness violent events, directly or on television, the result is often fear and confusion. Not only can the sudden and unexpected nature of many disasters cause high anxiety and even panic, young children are also most fearful when they do not understand what is happening around them. Their feelings and reactions should be expected and considered natural.

Helping children deal with their reactions to this disaster can be challenging when adults haven't had adequate time to deal with their own reactions, but adults should remember that children are very perceptive, and will quickly recognize the fear and anxiety that adults are experiencing.

The following strategies can help parents and other adults give children the emotional support they need, and show them that you are there to take care of them.

Give reassurance and physical comfort.

Physically holding children brings comfort and a sense of security. Children need extra hugs, smiles and hand-holding. Reassure them that they are safe and that there is someone there to take care of them. Hearing a family member or a teacher say, "I will take care of you," makes children feel safe. Young children have great faith in adults' powers and are responsive to adult reassurances. Model and demonstrate coping skills, because children will imitate adults in reacting to the situation.

Provide structure.

Children need to find consistency and security in their day, especially when the rest of their life is unpredictable. Provide a framework that will be the same from day to day. Emphasize familiar routines at playtime, clean-up, naptime, meals and bedtime. Make sure children are getting appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition. Play soothing music and model moving slowly and using a quiet voice. Children may have a difficult time accepting routines and other limits, but persevere by being firm and supportive. Make decisions for children when they cannot cope with choice.

Welcome children's talking about the disaster.

Children regain a sense of control by talking about things that bother them, and talking with a supportive adult can help them clarify their feelings. At the same time, children should not be pressured to talk; they may need time to absorb these experiences before discussing them. To help children feel comfortable, parents and other adults can share their own feelings of fear and anxiety, but they should always do so in a calm, reassuring way. For example, you might say, "I was frightened when I saw the explosions, but I knew there were people who were ready to help out." What children need most is to feel that the situation is under control.

Focus on experiences that help children release tension.

- \* Give children more time for the relaxing, therapeutic experience of playing with sand, water, clay and Play Dough.

- \* Provide plenty of time and opportunity for children to work out their concerns and feelings through dramatic play. Create props that children can use to pretend they are firefighters, doctors, rescue workers or other helpers. In dramatic play, children can pretend that they are big and strong to gain control over their trauma and to overcome feelings of helplessness.
- \* Spend more time in settings that give children opportunities for physical activity and that provide an emotional release.

Model peaceful resolution to conflict.

Peaceful resolution to conflict is one way to give children a stronger sense of power and control, especially critical in the wake of a disaster, which leaves them feeling powerless. Because children who have experienced the emotional trauma and violence of disaster often behave aggressively, they need to see alternatives to using violence to solve problems.

Maintain perspective.

As we learn more about the individuals who are responsible for these tragic events, adults must help children avoid making inappropriate assumptions and using labels about groups of people based on their race, ethnicity, religious background or national origin.

Watch for changes in behavior.

Mental health professionals suggest that, children, like adults, may exhibit symptoms of stress following a disaster. For preschoolers, such symptoms may include thumbsucking, bedwetting, clinging, changes in sleep or eating patterns, and isolation from other children. Older children may be irritable or aggressive and display poor concentration, among other changes in their behavior. Experts also suggest that it is natural for children to display behavioral changes as they emotionally process their anxiety and fear.

NAEYC has several other resources on our Web site that may be helpful for parents and others who work with young children: [www.naeyc.org/resources](http://www.naeyc.org/resources)

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## **The Trauma of Terrorism: Helping Children Cope**

Ilene R. Berson and Michael J. Berson

*September 11, 2001, began for many as an ordinary Tuesday morning throughout the United States. In some parts of the country, students were in school, some adults were at work or engaged in their daily routines, and others were still in peaceful slumber, unaware of the horrific series of events about to unfold. At about 8:45 a.m., the tragic assault on the country began. Within moments, the nation became a collective witness to and victim of a violent atrocity. Elie Wiesel has stated, "More than anything—more than hatred and torture—more than pain—do I fear the world's indifference."<sup>1</sup> The intensity of the response to this assault on the nation has awakened the compassion of our citizens. We have lived in a long period of peace, and this event has been a sudden jolt. The immediacy of the news accounts and images made everyone not only witnesses, but also participants in the tragedy. Unlike in times past, when travelers spread news of atrocities months after the event, firsthand knowledge of threat and potential for risk heightens the intensity of our response. Even those individuals who are far from the disaster sites cannot remain emotionally distant.*

*The terrifying aspect of this violence is the realization that we are not just bystanders to aggression but also the target of it. Violence is not a unique occurrence here, but mass destruction of human life still stirs fear and uneasiness across America. Because mass violence often appears to happen at a safe distance, we have remained detached from the reality that civilians are the sometimes accidental and often intentional victims of attacks. In recent conflicts, civilians account for almost 75 percent of resulting deaths.<sup>2</sup> Terrorism involves a violent lawlessness in which aggression intrudes into the ordinary existence of people.*

The horrors of conflict and organized violence have not escaped touching the lives of the young. A year is comprised of 525,600 minutes, but it takes only one moment to make a lasting impact on children and young adults. The powerful images of this event affected many students throughout the country, and the enduring influence is intensified as their imaginations are fed by the memory of the violence.

In fact, the end of the twenty-first century has been burdened by images of brutality. Conflicts are characterized by atrocity, and recent history attests to an abandonment of any "rules of war, starting with the abandonment of respect for any distinction between combatants and civilians, or the innocence of children."<sup>3</sup> In the United States, the shock of direct attacks on our own soil has left us to deal with the aftermath. We have little empirical research to guide our responses to this form of tragedy because so few terrorist attacks have occurred in the United States. The most recent event, the Oklahoma City bombing, provides the most updated understanding of the reaction of children.<sup>4</sup> We have learned from other tragic incidents that the meaning we assign to events and the messages we highlight are crucial to the healing process. Terrorism is insidious in infiltrating the collective psyche with fear and the pervasiveness of our horror. Children and young adults are especially vulnerable to the psychological impact. Adults must guide the response of children and youth to an awareness that "the world needn't be evil simply because some people are. It is only evil when we let the evil happen."<sup>5</sup> Social studies teachers in particular are confronted with how to respond to these acts of violence as they enveloped the nation. Gripping current events provide an important opportunity to expand students' global understanding of the world while integrating these important topics into the formal curriculum. While assisting students in managing devastation and loss, teachers can also see the experience as a segue into such content as the beliefs of Islam, the geography of Afghanistan, the history of U.S.-Middle East relations, security strategies, antiterrorist operations, and tolerance activities.

Many teachers recognize not only the importance of the events, but also the natural connection between these events and the social studies curriculum. Nonetheless, teachers need guidance on how to infuse these events into instruction.<sup>6</sup>

In the ensuing weeks, teachers must shift the focus from “What happened?” to “Where do we go from here?” How do we restore the faith of young people in the promise of their future as Americans who can live in safety and security? How can we triumph over our fears and prejudice? How do we use our strength and character as a nation not only to deal with the tragedy, but also to grow and seek out peace?

The following suggestions can guide social studies teachers in such addressing such important questions. Through these actions, teachers will seed the hope for the future.

### **Students’ Exposure to Terrorist Attacks**

Acts of terrorism infringe on our basic sense of safety and often leave us questioning whom to trust. “Human degradation and misery are intensified in the experience of the child whose innocence may be consumed by the horrid realities which disturb so many lives.”<sup>7</sup> American students could not escape the horrific images of the terrorist attack. Child victims of atrocities are particularly vulnerable and may require careful intervention to restore their sense of safety and security. Nonetheless, even in the face of devastating trauma, children and young adults have the potential to exhibit resiliency, courage, and an enduring vitality. By fostering coping skills and drawing on the strength of the collective community, we can help students begin to heal.

### **Behavioral and Emotional Effects of Exposure**

Links between an exposure to violence and negative behaviors in children and young adults exist across all age ranges. Exposure to a traumatic experience has short- and long-term consequences in a student’s life and can contribute to physical and mental health problems as well as educational impairments.<sup>8</sup> Even children and young adults who have been exposed to a single terrorizing event can clinical indicators of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, including fears, repetitive nightmares, thought reenactments, and thought suppression. The children and young adults with greater proximity to the event tend to experience more intense symptoms.<sup>9</sup> It may seem obvious that relatives of the victims or direct witnesses to the disaster may have strong responses, but other children and young adults may also have less obvious connections to the events, which similarly heightens their sensitivity to the trauma. These connections include students who have visited the buildings that were affected, whose parents fly frequently, who have recently suffered another loss, or who have experienced other forms of trauma. Students in the last two categories may have expended their coping resources in dealing with their daily problems and may not be equipped to handle further adversity in their lives.

Although responses to the events will be unique to individual students, ranging from total disinterest to chronic obsession and panic attacks, the age and developmental levels of a student are important in determining his or her ability to deal with the events. Young children under age six will typically look to adults to guide their response. The powerlessness and anxiety of parents and teachers may be apparent to the young, who often observe others around them for cues on how to act. Because young children relate events to themselves, they will be most worried about their own safety and the well-being of those they care about. Subsequently, they may become clingy and concerned about the whereabouts of parents and family members. Generalized fears may become more intense; loud noises, including sirens and the sounds of airplanes, may result in fearful reactions. Children may have greater difficulty sleeping and may be plagued by dreams of monsters other creatures during their rest periods.

Although crying and fussiness may appear more frequently, young children may have difficulty identifying feelings because they lack the vocabulary to express their emotions. Children may exhibit regressive symptoms and lose previously acquired skills. Conversely, if adults have successfully monitored their reactions and limited their children's exposure to media images of the tragedy, some young children may be relatively unaware of the attack. Other children may have repeated exposure to horrific images and misinformation about the event; they may presume, for example, that each viewing on television represents a separate incident in which a building is attacked, leaving the impression that hundreds of planes struck many structures.

Elementary-age children may express similar feelings of anxiety, appear fearful or worried, and cling to teachers or parents. They may be irritable in class, indicate concern about ongoing violence, and complain of headaches or stomach aches. In their play, elementary children may repeatedly reenact the event or discuss elements of the attack. Teachers may observe changes in children's behavior, with increased acting out, heightened aggression, angry outbursts, withdrawal, poor concentration, and impaired performance on school work. They may also hear children discussing death and dying.

Middle school students will exhibit comparable symptoms of anxiety. In addition, middle school concerns may include a generalized fear about school violence and war. In repeated discussions of the events, these students may share horrific details and focus on acts of revenge. Middle school students may struggle with accepting others who are different and may be more suspicious of diverse perspectives. Changes in school behaviors include defiance, as well as an increase in absenteeism or withdrawal from extracurricular activities. Some students may indicate that the terrorism has had no effect on them at all.

In the high school, students may not only be fearful and exhibit many of the signs of trauma noted in younger children, but may also feel vulnerable to death. They may try to numb this vulnerability with drugs or alcohol. Some students may become so transfixed on issues of death and dying, combined with a sense of hopelessness, that suicidal thoughts enter their minds. Other adolescents will appear unaffected by the atrocity. For some, this denial is a self-protective coping mechanism. For others, who by age eighteen have witnessed over 800,000 real and imaginary deaths on the television, they have already been desensitized to these acts (see [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)).

### **The Impact of Violence on Social Studies Teachers**

At the very time when students turn to their teachers for stability and support, teachers may be equally traumatized. The numbing effect of the trauma, combined with fear and depression, may make it hard for teachers to identify students in crisis. These adults may be more irritable and less responsive than usual. Some teachers may have less tolerance for student misbehavior, and their punitive response may leave students feeling withdrawn or perceiving themselves as bad. Other teachers, fearful of their reactions or lacking answers to students' questions, may avoid discussing the events. Teachers may worry about exacerbating the negative emotions of the students. Thus, while experiencing their own traumatic response, teachers' ability to play a stabilizing role and support students' resilience may be compromised.

At a time when students need structure and routine, teachers may have trouble concentrating on planning for lessons. Fear of being ill-equipped to handle controversial or emotionally laden content may result in a denial of the importance of the event. Some teachers may also become incapacitated with fear of physical harm in the school setting, exhibiting a hyper-vigilance to their surroundings.

Support offered within the school and throughout the broader community can help combat the sense of isolation and the saturation of the senses that overwhelms coping responses. Many students will sense the fear, tension, and confusion of teachers who are distracted by worry. Teachers need to reach out to their colleagues and use employee assistance programs when they are overwhelmed by their emotions and reactions. But supportive conversations among staff should be conducted outside the purview of students to protect them from re-exposure to frightening interactions. It is important for children to know that even though their teachers may be upset by the events, they are still capable of teaching and caring for them and meeting their needs in the classroom.

### **Discussions of Events and Feelings**

A safe and supportive environment in which to address concerns and feelings helps combat the sense of isolation and validate the presence of a caring community. The ability to deal with complex issues can be empowering to young people who must integrate into their experience barrage of facts, images, and diverse perspectives. Teachers need to understand that students' reactions to these events will vary. Young people who are experiencing other crises in their lives, including preexisting mental health and behavioral problems, may have intensified anxiety. Others will appear unaffected. These variation of feelings may also relate to the developmental stage of the student: young children are concerned about separation and safety, older elementary school students focus on fairness and caring for others, and adolescents grapple with the ethical dilemmas about violence and the resolution of conflict. Teachers can help children and adolescents cope with this disaster by attending to their words and actions and observing signs of distress.

Social studies teachers in particular can serve as important informants to children whose perspective on the tragedy may be influenced by rumors, speculation, and misunderstanding. Students need to express their feelings and to make sense of the events. Competing values and ethics may create stress as students wrestle with anti-violent sentiments, which have been promoted in schools, and revenge oriented ideology, which provides a simplistic mechanism for coping.

Regardless of the age of the students, young people need reassurance that they are safe and secure. This message needs to be reinforced over time, especially as new developments reintroduce concerns. A sense of security is communicated through consistent class routines and the fair application of rules of the classroom, which provide students with a sense that they have control of their environment. Flexibility in scheduling is also important, however, to allow students to process their thoughts and feelings and to receive accurate information. Because of television and other technologies, students who were not geographically present at the event became eyewitnesses and, in that sense, victims. Controlling student contact with disturbing images and adult conversations is important to limit exposure to vicarious traumatization. False assurances, however, are unsettling to students who experience a cognitive dissonance between the reality of the situation and the information they receive.

Teachers may find it helpful to structure a limited period of time for discussions, although they need to respond to students' questions that arise throughout the day directly and honestly, with a guided transition back to the class activity. Teachers should emphasize that it is the responsibility of adults to create safety for children. They should also give students an appropriate overview of school plans to address emergencies, including a review of school safety guidelines. Although we want students to recover the security and routine of their daily lives, we must also assist them in learning from this tragedy. Wallowing in fear is not productive; neither is living in a state of terror. But the complexity and enormity of this event may necessitate repeated discussions.

Anger management activities should be infused into class discussions. Students can describe how they successfully managed past frightening situations and identify effective coping strategies for dealing with stress. They often feel empowered when they realize that they have overcome hardships in the past. Relaxation exercises, creative activities (i.e., listening to music, reading stories, singing), and moments of quiet reflection are soothing to students. Students will also be comforted by knowing that over time, they will be able to cope with their strong feelings better. This is a crucial time to maintain open communication with parents and other school personnel about students' functioning. Mental health professionals in the school and community are a valuable resource for students who continue to experience strong emotions without relief.

Young children need repeated assurances that adults are working together to keep them safe and cared for. Young children may need extra assistance with transitions from home to school, with a warm greeting in the morning and a nurturing school environment during the day. In addition to verbal assurances, physical comfort—smiling faces, extra hugs, and hand-holding—is important. Because children will imitate teachers and parents, adults should model good coping skills. The complexity of information necessitates repeated clarification of information, including discussions of who is responsible for the event. Some children will believe that they are to blame for tragic events because of their misbehavior. Others will have inaccurate information about events. Teachers need to provide honest and realistic responses.

Young children also need to improve their “feeling vocabulary” so they can verbalize their distress. Teachers need to be aware of nonverbal cues that indicate fear, anger, or grief. For young children, hands-on activities are helpful for expressing feelings. These activities include watching puppet shows, drawing pictures, reading books, doing art projects, writing letters, making music, and taking action to help. Young children may need to reenact the experience to gain control over the event. Rescue materials, building blocks, and puppets can help children express their fear and anger.

In the elementary years, children may notice that adults are concerned and upset, but they need to know that the significant adults in their lives can still take care of them and guide them through the scary and angry feelings. Not talking about it makes children feel that the topic is taboo. Teachers can initiate the conversation with opening questions about the children's knowledge of the event and then let children guide the discussion. Strong feelings, such as anger, fear, anxiety, and grief, can be difficult emotions for children under any circumstances. Teachers should anticipate that children who feel overwhelmed and fearful might struggle with concentrating, sleeping, and controlling aggression. Maintaining routines can help. Children also need assistance in labeling their feelings and differentiating between angry emotions and angry behaviors.

Reenactment in play may help, but if children are unable to acquire a sense of control, this process may not be productive. During play, teachers can help students explore alternative endings and guide them to find words to explain their actions. Elementary students also may benefit from writing about their experiences, discussing other examples of disasters in literature, and observing that most people in their lives are caring and helpful.

Older students may not directly express their concerns but still grapple with fears about a reoccurrence of the event, the loss of a loved one, separation from the family, isolation, and loneliness. In addition to having access to adults who are receptive to questions, adolescents need guidance in developing constructive responses and alternative solutions. Class activities might emphasize constructing answers to questions together to demonstrate an orderly way to solve a problem. Sensitivity to the reactions of others may help identify other young people who are

relying on self-destructive mechanisms (i.e., drugs, alcohol, aggression) to cope. Teachers should carefully observe student behavior to redirect students before angry outbursts escalate into conflict.

As events continue to unfold, teachers will need to provide additional updates on basic facts and check on students' evolving understanding and ability to cope. (Prompts to guide discussions are available at [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org).) Teachers can model for their students how to express feelings in an appropriate manner by acknowledging the variety of their emotions and by managing expressions of anger and intense fear.

### **Building Students' Resilience to Trauma**

We need to safely steer students through the onslaught of emotions and images that have touched them since September 11. The creativity and vibrancy of childhood is violated by those images depicting an attack on the communities that are supposed to nurture their development.<sup>10</sup> The most important factor in restoring that sense of safety is a strong relationship with a competent, caring, positive adult. Students are comforted through the reassurance of significant adults and the engagement in normal routines. Specific discussions about safety and victim assistance will calm their fear. Children want to be assured that they and their family and friends will be OK. They need permission to laugh and play and explore their childhood.

Vulnerability and powerlessness disappear when a child discovers joy and self-efficacy.

### **Celebrate Diversity and Promote Tolerance**

In times of crisis, we are bound by the commonality of our experience, yet there remains the threat of isolating individuals on the basis of racial, ethnic, or religious differences. Now is an important time to ensure that the curriculum infuses tolerance-building activities that explore the rights of people throughout the world, consider historical examples of ethnic discrimination and stereotyping, and examine resources and organizations promoting tolerance and the elimination of terrorism. Lessons on religious understanding, with a particular focus on Islamic teachings, are important to counter misperceptions about Muslims and their beliefs. Students need to know that violent acts that target civilians are not Islamic in origin and "there is no justification in Islamic scriptures and jurisprudence for indiscriminate killings or assassinations of local or foreign citizens by either Sunni or Shiite Muslims."<sup>11</sup>

As fear over the event transforms to anger, the intensification of hatred can feed stereotypes and prejudice. In such an environment, atrocity and counter-atrocity flourish.<sup>12</sup> Dehumanization of the perpetrators of the event minimizes children's stress,<sup>13</sup> but teachers of adolescents must be wary of the danger of mis-socializing students with fear, violence, and hatred. Adults should be role models of acceptance and community.

In classrooms, we often have a tendency to present isolated details of events without an in-depth analysis of the conflict or exploration of multiple perspectives. In fact, students may experience confusion when the messages of patriotism replace thoughtful observation and discussion.<sup>14</sup> Teachers need to promote an understanding not only of patriotism for our own country, but also of the love that others feel for their countries.<sup>15</sup> An exploration of the efforts of world leaders to respond to terrorism can reduce hatred and violence on local, national, and global levels.

### **Celebrate the Helpers**

K-12 students can focus on the unity of communities in the wake of a tragedy. Moreover, students can affirm the actions of so many individuals who are committed to assisting the victims,

consoling families, investigating the tragedy, or working to ensure the continued safety of our nation.

A powerful counter response to powerlessness is action. Although the tragedy of September 11 has caused deep sorrow, we observe the heroic acts of so many generous and courageous people. Students should be encouraged not only to observe and celebrate the efforts of others, but also to engage in outreach and participatory service in their schools and communities. Memorials can also provide an opportunity for young people to share their feelings, and a range of service activities can offer students a chance to bond as a community and combat isolation and vulnerability.

### **Final Thoughts**

Acts of terrorism instill fear and helplessness in a society. Coping with the intense stress and trauma of these events can be overwhelming for our youth, who may feel especially vulnerable. To function optimally, each student has a basic need for safety and security.<sup>16</sup> Although many are still coping with the trauma of the terrorist attacks, teachers have the opportunity to transform students' shock into action. Already, many heroic individuals have modeled lessons of unity and strength. Survival does not mean insulating our youth from trauma, but rather providing them with skills to make a positive impact on their lives and the lives of others. "The basic law of terrorism is that even the smallest threat can ripple out to touch those a thousand miles away."<sup>17</sup> Our youth can instigate a counter response that spreads compassion, understanding, and hope throughout our nation and the global community.

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*From Donna L. Schuurman, Ed.D., Executive Director, The Dougy Center for Grieving Children & President, Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC)*

### **In the Wake of the Terrorist Attacks on America: How Do We Respond to Our Children?**

September 11's terrorist attacks destroy a sense of safety for every adult and child in America today. No other event in modern history on American soil has resulted in such loss of life. Here are some principles to help inform your response to your children, and some tips for responding to their needs:

*1. There is no one typical reaction one can or should expect from children.*

The responses of children to the terrorist attacks and deaths will vary all over the map, from seeming disinterest to nightmares and panic attacks. How any individual child or adolescent responds will depend on several factors including:

- \* Their age, both chronologically and developmentally, which determines their ability to understand and process the scope and enormity of these events;
- \* Their basic personality style: Fearful children will tend to worry; quiet children will tend to keep their feelings to themselves; those who want to appear unfazed may evidence a sense of bravado or lack of caring, etc.;
- \* Their connection to the human aspects of the disaster ú e.g. if they had a relative, friend, or acquaintance die; if they witnessed the disaster in person; if they've had other recent losses or traumatic events in their lives, etc.

*2. Children understandably may have an increased sense of fear about their safety, and the safety of others, particularly if they have parents or relatives who fly frequently.*

It is important to provide a sense of security and safety for our children, while not sacrificing honesty and truth. Do not lie to children about what happened. At the same time, reassure them that you will do everything in your power to protect yourself and to keep them from harm. We will all be inundated with images in the media everywhere we turn. Children need the opportunity to process what they think and how they feel about this, without it consuming them or violating their need to feel safe. Don't impose your own fears on them; listen to what they have to say and watch for changes in behavior that may be of concern: nightmares, changes in eating or sleeping patterns, changes in appearance or habits, depression.

#### **Tips on helping children and adolescents cope following this disaster:**

*1. Listen to what they are saying verbally, as well as what their behavior is saying.*

Don't try to judge, control, or direct what they are saying. Rather, provide the opportunity for them to express what they need to as long as their behavior is safe. They may also need to tell the same story or ask the same questions over and over. Be patient and listen to their concerns. Non-verbal children may "play out" their fears, sometimes through angry or aggressive behavior.

*2. Be honest. Don't lie about what happened.*

They will hear the truth from others, and if they believe you are not to be trusted, they won't share with you. At the same time, don't impose your own fears and concerns on them. At their age, they cannot fully understand the scope and worldwide significance of these attacks.

*3. Encourage consistency and routines.*

One way to help restore a sense of safety is to keep to your routines and "predictable" behavior. This is not to imply a rigid adherence to rules, so you still should have some flexibility, but

because an event of this magnitude creates a feeling of being out of control. Children need to have a sense of grounding and safety.

*4. Resist being overprotective.*

It's natural to want to be extra protective, but often by doing so we are meeting our own adult needs at the expense of our children's needs. Take all necessary precautions in protecting your children, but don't go overboard in doing so. Some children may be fearful of separation from their loved ones.

*5. Don't be surprised by children or adolescents who seem to think what happened is "no big deal."*

Some children and adolescents may be (or appear to be) unaffected by the terrorist events. For some, this may be a 'natural' way to protect themselves from the possibility that they are vulnerable. Much like our bodies go into shock when a physical trauma happens, our minds can go into a self-protective numbing in order to cope with the enormity of traumatic events. Additionally, a typical American child at age 18 has witnessed over 800,000 deaths on television, and may not have a full understanding of the difference between reality and made-for-TV shows.

*6. Don't be surprised by children or adolescents who don't "act their age."*

Some children will be anxious and insecure, and their behavior may revert to younger behaviors. Others may exhibit behaviors beyond their age, acting, in effect, like "little adults." Understand that they are, in their own ways, trying to make sense of what is beyond the comprehension of most adults.

If you have a child who is directly affected by a death, check our national directory of children's grief programs and resources: [www.grievingchild.org/centers/centers.html](http://www.grievingchild.org/centers/centers.html) See especially the guidebook series, including Helping Children Cope with Death, Helping Teens Cope with Death, and 35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child.

*The Dougy Center is a nonprofit organization serving children, teens and families following the death of a family member or friend. Since 1982, the Center's pioneering model for coping with death has resulted in over 130 additional programs developing through the U.S. and internationally, including programs following the Oklahoma City bombing, Kobe, Japan earthquake, and war-related devastation in Rwanda, Africa. The Dougy Center's phone: 503.775.5683 E-mail: [help@dougy.org](mailto:help@dougy.org)*

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## Listing of Children's Grief Services in Connecticut

Association of Death Education &  
Counseling  
342 North Main Street  
West Hartford, CT 06105-4250  
(860) 586-7533  
(860) 586-7550 fax  
[www.adec.org](http://www.adec.org)

\*Healing Hearts  
Regional Hospice of Western CT  
30 West Street  
Danbury, CT 06810  
(203) 797-1685  
(203) 792-1402

\*The Center for Hope, Inc.  
590 Post Road  
Darien, CT 06820  
(203) 655-4693  
(203) 655-3452  
[www.centerforhope.org](http://www.centerforhope.org)

\*The Den For Grieving Kids / Family  
Centers  
40 Arch Street  
Greenwich, CT 06830  
(203) 869-4848  
(203) 869-7764 fax  
[www.familycenters.org/children.html](http://www.familycenters.org/children.html)

\* Asterisk marked programs trained in **The  
Doug Center** model.

Teen Grief Group  
Hospice and Palliative Care of Connecticut  
33 N Plains Industrial Road  
Wallingford, CT 06492  
(203) 679-5300

The Cove Center for Grieving Children  
134 State Street  
Meriden, CT 06450  
(203) 634-0500  
(800) 750-2683 (COVE)  
(203) 634-6934 fax  
[www.neclt.org/cove.htm](http://www.neclt.org/cove.htm)

United Community and Family Services  
47 Town Street  
Norwich, CT 06360  
(860) 892-7042  
[www.ucfs.org](http://www.ucfs.org)

The Cove/West Hartford  
854 Farmington Avenue  
West Hartford, CT 06119  
(860) 233-1700

\*Mary's Place  
A Center for Grieving Children and Families  
6 Poquonock Avenue  
Windsor, CT 06095  
(860) 688-9621  
(860) 683-0206 fax