

Handout 14

NIMH (2001) Recommendations for Helping Children Cope With Crises

1. Give yourself a bit of time to come to terms with the event before you attempt to reassure children.
2. Take care of yourself so that you can take care of children.
3. Explain the episode of violence or disaster. Replace crisis rumors with crisis facts. At the same time, however, do not volunteer details that might increase children's threat perceptions.
4. Encourage children to express their feelings and listen without passing judgment.
5. Let children know that it is normal to feel upset.
6. Allow time for children to experience and talk about their feelings.
7. Don't try to rush back to ordinary routines too soon. However, a gradual return to routine can be reassuring.
8. If children are fearful, reassure them that you will take care of them.
9. Stay together as much as possible.
10. If behavior at bedtime is a problem, give children extra time and reassurance. Let him or her sleep with a light on or in your room for a limited time if necessary.
11. Reassure children that the traumatic event was not their fault.
12. Do not criticize regressive behavior or shame children with words like "babyish."
13. Do your best to let children know that you understand their perception of the crisis event. Try to put yourself in their shoes.
14. While it is important to understand children's crisis event perceptions, it is also important to correct misperceptions.
15. Allow children to cry or be sad.
16. Encourage children to feel in control. Let them make some decisions about meals, what to wear, etc.
17. Encourage children to develop coping and problem-solving skills and age-appropriate methods for managing anxiety.