

## WAYS TO HELP A TRUAMATIZED CHILD/ADOLESCENT\*

- Do not be surprised by any significant changes in behavior or personality.
- Be more nurturing and comforting.
- Pay more attention, spend more time.
- Provide consistent care with younger children.
- Let them know where you are going, when you'll be back. If you are gone for several hours, call and let them know you are all right.
- Permit them to talk about it if they want to.
- Encourage them to let you know when they are thinking about it or when new reactions occur.
- Normalize (explain) the reactions they have and are likely to have and, given their experience, how normal these reactions are.
- Provide labels, especially for younger children, for the feelings they are having, i.e., sad, afraid, etc.
- Inform teachers so they do not misinterpret the child's different behavior as something it is not.
- Be patient with difficulties in concentration, completing school work or other tasks.
- Limit tasks. Keep them simple.
- Be patient with regressive behavior such as nail biting, thumb sucking.
- If their behaviors or changes in personality scare you consult with a trauma specialist, but also reinforce that you understand that these are a result of their experience.
- Share their concerns for safety, but be realistic.
- Help them not to generalize.
- Remind them as needed that "that (incident) was then" and this is now and things have changed.
- Understand that new physical reactions such as headaches, fatigue, etc., are in response to overwhelming fears and their attempts to avoid them.
- Help them share their fears and worries.
- Help them understand the relationship between their anger and their trauma and find safe ways they can discharge their anger, ie., draw, write,talk about it, exercise, etc.

- Help them hold onto positive memories of the victim, especially during their most difficult days.
- Do not hurry their reactions along by saying, "It's time to get over it."
- Share your own trauma or frightening experiences. ("You survived; they can too" is the unspoken message when you share your experiences).
- Help them understand that their now angry, defiant, aggressive behavior, staying away from home or taking unnecessary risk is a way to avoid feeling the pain, the hurt, the terror they experienced. Avoiding, however, will hurt them more.
- Help them talk about what they think could have been differently.
- Emphasize, if they are feeling shame or guilt, that no one ever taught them to react in such a situation, they did not choose for it to happen and they are not responsible.
- If shame is tied to a physical reaction during the event such as wetting pants, vomiting, crying, etc., assure them that unlike television portrayals, most people faced with terror will lose control over their bodies.
- If they are talking about revenge, ask about their plan and talk about realistic responses. Then provide additional ways to not let revenge take control of their life and to better help them with the pain. Ask for help with this.
- If children express that they are not afraid of anything anymore, "nothing scares me," be more protective of them as they will not act safely in a potentially dangerous situation with others who put them at risk.

From The Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC)