

## **Parenting in a Crisis**

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**What is the Problem?** We've been terrorized, and as a result, we're experiencing a myriad of feelings -- most commonly, fear, anger and sadness. These feelings are expressed in ways that are different from what we usually do. Many of these responses are normal, given the situation. Most important, however, is trying to keep fear from becoming a phobia, anger becoming rage, or sadness becoming depression.

**What would we like?** If you are like me, you want life to return to the way it was. I would like to wake up from this bad dream, but unfortunately, that's not going to happen.

**What is the reality?** The reality is that this terrorist act *has* occurred; much uncertainty remains; we don't know what's going to happen next; other people are making many decisions that can affect us; and no matter what, life in America is going to be different. Our typically routine and secure life has changed, and we must adjust to the changes. So now that we understand the reality, we must consider a period of grieving and adjustment. We've been told that life is a process, and we're supposed to experience and enjoy the journey, but this is one trip that we may feel pretty uncertain about taking.

**What can I expect?** An unusual response to an unusual situation is normal. We have witnessed the loss of more than 6,000 civilian lives through terrorist bombings in what we thought were peaceful times.

As part of a normal response to these events, we can expect expressions of emotion, changes in thinking and changes in behavior. These changes will be more pronounced based on our tendencies toward reacting to stressful events and how close to the actual events we were.

We can also expect a new structure and routine to emerge. The more aware and intentional we are, the more control we can have about what emerges.

### **What are symptoms of stress?**

Symptoms vary by age but can include:

- Increased aggression
- Spending more time alone
- Not wanting to leave the family
- Interrupted sleep
- Changes in eating
- Drop in grades
- Not wanting to sleep alone
- Guilt
- Increased concerns about health
- Unrelenting need for information and understanding

## What can I do?

Be a STAR    Stop    Think    Assess    Respond

- **Take good care of yourself, understand your own feelings, manage your thinking and behavior and become role models for your children. You can't take care of them if you are running on empty.**
- **Grieve your losses and respect the process. Making feelings disappear doesn't make them go away.**
- **Create a new normality, getting back to typical schedules as soon as possible.**
- **Integrate the grieving process into life – don't let it become life.**
- **Plan more time to be with your children**
- **Understand your child's style and how that blends with your own. Adjust your style to theirs to communicate more easily**
- **Answer questions honestly but without more information than necessary. Consider the age and understanding level of your child. If you don't know the answer to a question, find out and be sure to get back to your children with what you've learned.**
- **Reduce the amount of TV time – especially for the younger children. With children under 6 or 7, every time they see the towers fall, it's like it's happening all over again.**
- **Draw your children out and ask them what they know about what happened and what their feelings are.**
- **Talking about fear won't make your children more afraid. It may actually calm them.**
- **Reassure your children, but be honest. For example – “many new security measures are in place to help keep us safe,” but not, “there won't be any more plane crashes.”**
- **Do something in that is helpful for someone else.**

## When do I seek professional help?

- When you know you are having difficulty adjusting.
- When the changes you notice in your child are not reducing after two weeks.

## Where is help available?

Clergy  
Pediatricians  
School counselors  
Local mental health organizations

For more information on the web

<http://www.aboutourkids.org>

<http://www.drspock.com>

<http://healthscout.com/template.asp?page=newsdetail&ap=1&id=501569>

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