

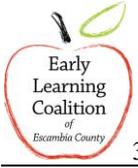
Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

3300 N. Pace Blvd, Suite 210, Pensacola, Florida 32505 Phone (850) 595-5400 Fax (850) 332-5140

Teacher and Caregivers Guide For Dealing with Tragedy

In the aftermath of a natural disaster such as a hurricane, many adults have questions about how to handle this difficult situation with young children who may or may not be aware of what is going on around them. The following are some guidelines for caregivers and teachers:

- ✓ Identify your own feelings: *Are you scared, angry, worried?* It is okay to have these difficult feelings and it is okay to let children see you sad. Let children know that they are not the cause of your feelings. It is very important to maintain daily routines.
- ✓ If you need to talk about your feelings, which most of us do, find someone to talk to away from the children. They do not need to know how concerned you are and they do not need to hear your political opinions.
- ✓ Young children follow the people who care about them - they will take their lead from you. The way you handle this situation will teach the child how to handle it.
- ✓ Teach children by example that even when you are sad, scared or angry that you still need to keep your routines. It is important to eat, sleep, work, and play. This will help children feel secure. Keep children's routines normal, consistent and predictable.
- ✓ Recognize signs children may be upset by the recent events. Let them know it is okay to be sad and to cry. Tears are simply a tender tribute to mourning.
- ✓ Listen to children. Allow them to express their feelings. Talk about feelings and behaviors. Honor these experiences by listening rather than giving advice.
 - What can you do when you are scared? (Find someone to hold you, someone to talk to, etc).
 - What can you do when you are angry? (Find an outlet such as exercise or movement, writing, drawing, etc).
 - What can you do when you are sad? (Cry, put your head on someone's shoulder, hug your pet or your teddy bear).
- ✓ Be nurturing, comforting and affectionate if children seem to need a little bit of extra love then give it to them, it will probably make you feel better too.
- ✓ Don't tell the children how to feel or how not to feel, listen and respond to their feelings with warmth and compassion.



Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County

3300 N. Pace Blvd, Suite 210, Pensacola, Florida 32505 Phone (850) 595-5400 Fax (850) 332-5140

Talk with the children and give them information appropriate for their ages

(This information is for children who have not lost family members or friends in the terrorist attack)

Information from *zerotothree.org* and *the Red Cross*:

One year olds are upset when you're upset. They most likely will not know about or be able to understand what has happened. However, they may react to your tension, fear or pain. Be reassuring.

Two year olds have a concept of hurt. They will pick up on people being hurt. Point out that there are lots of people helping those who are hurt. Reassure them that you will do your best to keep them safe.

Three year olds will have more understanding of what they see on the news and will wonder if it's real. You might say something like "Yes, it's real – but we're okay." Talk about it, don't ignore it. Don't be surprised if they say the same things over and over again. Be reassuring.

Four to six year olds may express their feelings about the event in their play and their artwork, this is healthy for them to process what they understand about the event. Of course they must still play so that everyone is safe and not scared. Recognize that children will handle this in many different ways. It will be difficult for them to understand that the loss and damage are permanent, they may wonder if everyone will be okay later. Be honest in your responses to their questions. For instance if a child asks you if the people will be okay tomorrow you might say, "No, they have died, I am very sad about it." Children might like to do something such as write letters to survivors, draw pictures, plant a tree or perennial plant, fly a flag or make donations. It makes all of us feel better if we can help a little bit.

Six to twelve year olds will have a greater understanding of the permanence of the loss and may have emotional reactions such as anger, guilt, and sorrow. Maintain routines, be honest, and offer some activities that will allow them to feel as if they are helping their fellow humans. Children are better able to regain their sense of power and security if they can help in some way. It is very important to help them understand that people of all different ethnic backgrounds live in America and are Americans. As Americans we need to show kindness and compassion. Hatred and fear of people who are different are the very things that caused this horrific event.

REMINDER:

Many of us feel helpless in a tragic situation but we are not helpless! As teachers and caregivers you are helping to shape the minds and hearts of this nation. Human goodwill and kindness illuminate the darkness even as a single candle can pierce the darkness. Teaching kindness, gentleness and acceptance of others is the best chance we have to prevent this kind of event. Each time you help a child to solve a conflict using peacemaking skills you are helping to make the world a better place, for generations to come.