



CARE's WorkLife Solutions

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Helping Children Cope with Trauma

Amid the upset and uncertainty that comes with the current military conflict, working parents are especially concerned as to how they can assist their children in coping with events. Clinicians from the Macomb County-based Employee Assistance Center offer the following suggestions.

For preschool and kindergarten-aged children:

Limit the child's exposure. It's human nature to want to learn all we can about events as they unfold, and 24-hour news coverage has helped that process. However, it's in the child's best interest to limit his/her exposure to images of these events. Wait until the child is in bed to watch TV or listen to the radio, and keep newspaper photos and magazine covers away from little eyes.

Maintain the child's routine. Change is difficult for younger children; even slight adjustments in their daily routine can cause upset. While it may be difficult to do so given your own upset, it's important to maintain your child's sleeping, eating and school routine.

For older children:

Be available to answer questions. Let children know that it's OK to talk about unpleasant events. Listen to what they think and feel. By listening, you can find out if they have any misunderstandings, and you can learn more about the support they need. You do not need to explain more than they are ready to hear, just be willing to answer their questions.

Help children find a course of action. One important way to reduce stress is to take action. Whether it's writing a letter to send troops or participating in a prayer service at your place of worship, encourage your young person to choose a course of action to direct feelings in a positive, helpful way. Let the young person determine what action s/he will take; s/he may have wonderful ideas.

For all children:

Reassure them, and help them feel safe. Reassure your child that s/he is safe, that you love him/her and that you'll do all you can to protect him/her from harm. Of course you can't keep all bad things from happening to a young person, but let your child know that as a parent, you'll do all you can.

Express healthy grief. You are a role model to your child. Expressing anger inappropriately or turning to alcohol or other drugs to help overcome your own upset are unhealthy ways to handle life's difficulties. It's OK to express sadness and show grief in front of your child, while reassuring your child that you're still in control and that s/he is safe.