

Helping Children in the Midst of Crisis

These suggestions are taken from pp 165-176 in *Sojourners' The Family on the Move, A Book of Resources* by Ruth J. Rowen & Samuel F. Rowen (1990). Farmington, Michigan: Associates of Urbanus.

DON'T...

1. laugh and tell him it is silly to feel that way.
2. ignore it and just hope that it will go away.
3. fuss over the fear and give it lots of attention.
4. compare him with the younger brothers or sisters who may not be afraid.
5. instill fears in your child by telling them about all the tragedies which are happening in the world every day.
6. allow him to see your fears uncontrolled. Fears are mimicked.
7. display a great measure of apprehension in ways which would substantiate his or her fears.

DO...

1. listen intently to him when he casually mentions his fear or wants to talk about it.
2. accept the fact that the fears are real to him, even the imaginary ones. Allow him to have those feelings. The real and the imaginary need to be given the same consideration.
3. educate him regarding the situation. He may just be lacking complete information. Inform him of the situation if it has to do with schooling, friends, food, wild animals etc. The unknown causes fear. Use books, pictures or videos to help him understand.
4. comfort him and give him the support he needs during the period of these fears. Many of them will be overcome in a few weeks to several months ; however, during this period, be extra sensitive to his feelings and give extra support.
5. teach him that God promises to be with us. Isaiah 43 :5 says, "Have no fear, for I am with you." The promise is that God will be with us at all times – even in difficult situations.
6. pray with your child regarding his fears.

7. give an extra measure of love and security during this time – even extra family time together would be beneficial.
8. look for positive experiences in relationship to that fear which will help it to dissipate. If his fear is of dogs, spend some time with a friend's dog that is gentle and friendly. Allow the child to begin playing with the dog at his own pace.
9. be sure both parents are agreed on how to handle the situation.
10. talk with other parents whose children may have experienced similar fears and find out how they handled it.
11. consult your pediatrician if necessary. He can help determine the best way to overcome certain fears which cause sleeping or eating disorders. Often bedwetting and nightmares are a result of fears deep-seated in children.
12. remember that all children develop fears while growing up and whether they develop into more serious problems or not, depends largely on how parents handle the situation.
13. debrief children after a crisis to let them tell their story and reveal any wrong assumptions, fears, personal blaming, etc. Parents can reframe the crisis for their children.

Common Victim Reactions By Age Groupings

Pre-School: Fears and worries; somatic problems; play which has themes of the trauma, compulsions, regression, separation anxiety, nightmares and sleep disturbances.

School Age: Fears and worries, somatic problems; play which has themes of the trauma, compulsions, regression, separation anxiety, nightmares and sleep disturbances, fantasies, anger, hostility and belligerence, interpersonal problems, school phobias and other school problems, apathy and withdrawal, guilt, personality change, chronic sadness and depression, self-deprecation.

Adolescent: Fears and worries, nightmares and sleep disturbances, fantasies, anger, hostility and belligerence, interpersonal problems, school phobias and other school problems, apathy and withdrawal, guilt, personality change, chronic sadness and depression, self-deprecation, intellectualization, rationalization, anxiety, acting out.

Taken from Helping Traumatized Families by C.R. Figley, 1989. Jossey-Bass Inc.