



Pima County Attorney's Office Victim Services Division

Helping Children Cope With Trauma

When a traumatic incident occurs, the natural flow of every day life is interrupted and unsettling for children, even if they did not personally witness the event or know the victims. It is natural for children to have many questions and to experience anxiety and fear.

Sometimes parents are concerned that if they talk about these tragedies children will become even more upset. This is a myth. Children have longer and more severe crisis reactions than adults. This is due to several factors: children have developed fewer coping skills than adults, children do not have as many life experiences to realize that time facilitates healing and children may not have the vocabulary, or general verbal skills to adequately express their concerns. When a traumatic incident occurs and children's questions and concerns are not addressed, their active imaginations create scenarios and fears that are even worse than the current reality.

REMEMBER that children see, hear, and absorb much more than we sometimes realize!

LOSS IS A COMMON REACTION

- ♥ loss of feeling safe
- ♥ loss of feelings of control
- ♥ loss of trust in others
- ♥ loss of identity/future
- ♥ loss of hope

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS ARE COMMON

- ♥ aches and pains, including headaches
- ♥ gastro-intestinal complaints
- ♥ over-eating or loss of appetite
- ♥ difficulties sleeping
- ♥ skin rashes or itching
- ♥ overall anxiety reactions
- ♥ dry mouth, extra thirsty

EMOTIONAL OR BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

- ♥ regression to younger behaviors (thumb sucking, toileting issues, etc.)
- ♥ loss of interest in usual activities
- ♥ disruptive behavior - especially anger reactions
- ♥ clinging to adults, fearful to be alone
- ♥ sadness or depression
- ♥ repetitive play about the crime
- ♥ difficulty concentrating

HOW TO HELP A CHILD

- ☺ talk, listen, talk some more -don't be afraid to ask a child what he/she is thinking or worried about
- ☺ ask the child to draw a picture of how he/she is feeling
- ☺ ask the child what would make him/her feel safe
- ☺ reassure the child that he/she is safe right now
- ☺ reassure the child that it is normal to feel scared right now
- ☺ restore a sense of routine and give the child tasks where they can have control
- ☺ be aware that children will model behavior based on what you and other significant adults do
- ☺ give additional attention and reassurance
- ☺ encourage time with friends
- ☺ practice things the child can say or do to increase their own safety
- ☺ answer questions honestly
- ☺ help a worried, sad, or confused child find a positive action to take

When problems continue for a period of more than a couple of weeks, a child may need some individual assistance. The Pima County Attorney's Victim Services Division is here to serve you. Please feel free to call with questions or for additional information about local resources.

**(520) 724-5525 Office hours are Monday through Friday
8:00a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

**Pima County Attorney's Office
Victim Services Division
32 North Stone, 8th Floor
Tucson, Arizona 85701
(520) 724-5525**