

## APPENDIX C WHAT CAN I DO AS A PARENT?

The most important thing that you can do as a parent is to be understanding of your child's initial expression of emotion, whether that be sadness, confusion, silence, withdrawal, anger, or denial. All of these are normal reactions to grief. When your child does express their emotions, it is important that their feelings be acknowledged and supported, not minimized. Don't try to distract or cheer up a grieving child. It's health for children to talk about their feelings with others, whether it be you, the clergy, a teacher, a counselor, or peers.

While most children make a satisfactory adjustment, children who demonstrate extreme reactions or fail to show improvement over a period of time may be in need of professional support. If you have questions or are in need of additional information, please contact the school at 586-1211 (elementary) or 586-1700 (high school) for a list of counselors available in the area.

### Tips for Helping Children Cope

- Encourage children to ask questions. Listen to what they say. Provide comfort and assurance that address their specific fears. Its okay to admit you can't answer all of their questions.
- Talk on their level. Communicate with your children in a way they can understand. Don't get too technical or complicated.
- Be honest. Tell them exactly what has happened. For example, don't say that someone who has died as "gone to sleep;" children may become frightened of going to bed.
- Find out what frightens them. Encourage children to talk about fears they may have.
- Focus on the positive. Reinforce the fact that most people are kind and caring. Remind your child of the heroic actions taken by ordinary people to help victims of tragedy.
- Pay attention. Your children's play and drawings may give you a glimpse into their questions or concerns. Ask them to tell you what is going on in the game or the picture. It's an opportunity to clarify any misconceptions, answer questions, and give assurance.
- Develop a plan. Establish a family emergency plan for the future, such as a meeting place where everyone should gather if something unexpected happens in your family or neighborhood. It can help your child feel safer.

### Tips for Talking with Children in Trauma—Interventions at Home for Preschoolers to Adolescents

#### Preschooler:

- Stick to regular family routines.
- Make an extra effort to provide comfort and reassurance.
- Avoid unnecessary separations.
- Permit a child to sleep in the parent's room temporarily.
- Encourage expression of feelings and emotions through play, drawing, and storytelling.
- Limit media exposure. Some parents may wish to limit their child's exposure to graphic or troubling scenes. To the extent possible, watch reports of the event or disaster with children so you can answer questions that arise.

#### Elementary Age Children:

- Provide extra attention and consideration
- Set gentle but firm limits for action out behaviors.
- Listen to a child's repeated telling of his/her trauma experience.
- Encourage expression of thoughts and feelings through conversation and play.
- Provide home chores and activities that are structured, but not too demanding.
- Rehearse safety measures for future incidents.

- Point out kind deeds and the ways in which people helped each other during a disaster or traumatic event.

Preadolescents and Adolescents:

- Provide extra attention and consideration.
- Be there to listen to your children, but don't force them to talk about feelings or emotions.
- Encourage them to return to as normal a routine as possible in a timely manner.