

Schools must feel safe for students, staff and parents.

We know that to succeed, schools need to operate with the goal of seeking out those youth who are "in the margins" and find means to bring them into the mainstream. We need to examine all the ways we are labeling kids, from disability issues to "gang" kids or "street kids" and, one at a time, bring them into activities or relationships that matter for them. It is both easier and more effective to do this at an early age.

We need to support staff in being student-centered. If it isn't working for the kids, it isn't working! With all of the state mandates and the amount of time we spend in academic assessment, it becomes increasingly difficult to remain student-centered.

Integrate both education about conflict resolution and have teachers practicing and modeling those skills and values in the classroom. Most programs in conflict resolution share common beliefs that:

- conflict is to be expected in life.
- prejudices and pre-conceived notions color our ability to get along
- conflict rarely results in a winner and a loser -- nobody really wins unless both parties feel satisfied with a resolution.
- asserting oneself through language or other non-violent means prevents youth from becoming school-yard bullies *or* victims
- learning skills for non-violence also feeds the self-esteem of the child.

Needs of Students

- An honest accounting of facts and relevant details.
- Understanding of the political situation.

- Reassurances safety and security.
 - Opportunity to verbally or actively process the event:
 - talking, drawing pictures, listening to stories, hearing others talk
 - opportunity to ask questions, respectful and honest answers
 - Time for this to sink in.
 - To address issues again (and again, and again).
 - Opportunities to be actively involved in doing something helpful.
 - To express their feelings
 - May need to repeat certain things or ask same the questions over and over.
 - For adults to model having feelings.
 - Lots of reassurance, need feelings and experience validated.
 - May benefit from DOING; like drawing pictures,
 - Support their thoughts and feelings and still expect appropriate behavior.
 - Continued structure; maintain disciplinary code with some flexibility.
- Stable environment, predictable schedule (exceptions are announced)

REMEMBER, kids sense if something is wrong - *not* addressing it is leaving far more to deal with forever than doing what you really can do now. It is better to be honestly reflective of the obvious ("I can see you are scared.") than artificially cheerful. The younger the child, the more concrete in reasoning.

Youth of all ages experience feelings of helplessness as they recognize their dependence upon adults for their care and protection. In general, the effects of the incident on them often correlate to whether adults remained calm during the event and in the immediate aftermath. The more the children feel they can trust the adults to come through for them, the better off they will be. Youth of all ages have low tolerance for changes in routine and cling to predictability and stability. They may experience eating and sleeping disturbances in response to trauma. Psychosomatic illness is not uncommon.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SCHOOL STAFF

- Talk with students
- Talk with students, discussing that it is all right to have different feelings and reactions -- to cry, be angry, upset, and to react differently than peers.
- Discuss their emotions (disbelief, feeling like you're going crazy, calm, then shift to tears, can't sleep, afraid the everything). Normalizing that, although we may be frightened there isn't anything wrong with us. It just doesn't feel like we are accustomed to feeling.
- Explain that you are there for them to talk to.
- Have quiet time.
- Be a role model regarding the expressing and showing of emotion as being a

healthy response.

- Talk about the fun and good memories.
- Be open to talking about the bad memories, too.
- Avoid platitudes.
- Openness, flexibility -- be ready for anything -- students will react in a variety of ways.

ESPECIALLY FOR TEENS

(This list developed by teens in Bereavement Support Program, Caledonia Health Care.)

Things that help

- being acknowledged (knowing people were thinking of me)
- working (it was often a relief to stay busy)
- helping (helping others made me feel better)
- sharing
- talking (I was grateful for friends who were willing to listen)
- crying (it helped loosen up the knots inside me and brought relief)
- laughing (I learned it was OK to laugh and have a good time, too)
- hugging (it often meant more than words could say)
- being with my friends (I like sometimes doing the old, "normal" stuff and getting away from home)
- being alone (sometimes that's what I wanted most – there aren't any rules)

Things that hurt

- being avoided (people didn't know what to say or do)
- being pushed to talk (sometimes I didn't feel like talking or didn't like people being nosy)
- feeling different (people whispered about me, looked at me. Sometimes I just wanted to forget what had happened and feel normal again)
- being told how to feel ("you shouldn't cry", "don't be angry", "you should be over this by now", "everyone feels that way")

SPECIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN

Children's reactions are very dependent upon the perceived stability or powerlessness of their care-givers. Take an example of two fourth grade classes in an earthquake. The tremor begins and chunks of ceiling material begins falling down. The roar seems very loud and everyone is on high alert. In Mrs. Jones class, the children see her panic and run out of the room screaming. Next door, Mrs. Smith is saying, "This is an earthquake! Get under your desks and wrap your arms around your head. This feels scary, but if you're under a table you'll be safer." And when the rumbling stops, she looks up from under her desk and says, "How are we doing? Let's go outside just like we do in a fire drill," and she organizes her kids to quietly and quickly leave the building.

The residual trauma symptoms for youth in Mrs. Jones' class will likely be much greater than those with Mrs. Smith. Children are continually in a stage of life which is one of dependence upon adults around them for survival. During

crisis, this is terrifically magnified. Those youth who have an adult who maintains a sense of calm and what little control there is will likely come out of it with a sense that bad things happen, but adults help you be safe and survive. Those in Mrs. Jones class may be thinking that when scary things happen, you're pretty much on your own. Abandonment in times of trauma can leave lasting scars. Perhaps not permanent, but challenging.

The younger the child, the less the ability to screen out elements of the trauma. One fascinating difference in how adults and children remember traumatic events is that adults often "forget" or don't "log in" some of the most horrifying aspects of the event. Children, however, have no screens. In questioning people following crimes, often the children remember aspects of the event that adults have blocked out. This also means that the *amount* of trauma from which the child will need to recover may be greater than that of adults who appear to have the same exposure to the event. Kids just take it all in.

Add to that their lack of context for life having trauma and then having the possibility for recovery. It is not likely that they have a model for this. Television does not help with this for several reasons.

When we watch a show with a murder, not much time is likely to be given to the victim's family's recovery process. We rarely see the consequence of the crime to those who were affected by it. Television does very selective, unrealistic portrayal of trauma.

SCHOOL-WIDE MANAGEMENT IN THE AFTERMATH OF TRAUMA

Because trauma differs fundamentally from grief, the needs of the student body and school-wide management requires specific considerations.

Group hysteria or students "feeding off" each other is not uncommon. Management of contagion. depends upon calm leadership and consistency in discipline. This is not a time to make major exceptions regarding expectations of student behavior.

Rumor control requires having one specific person who is clearing and verifying information. Encourage students to take their rumors and thoughts directly to the individual in charge of this process and discourage them from spreading rumors amongst themselves. Assure them you will get back to them with the truth as soon as possible.

Model your belief that action can be taken and is being taken which will bring things back toward homeostasis. Take appropriate steps, keep students informed.

This brings about a sense of control.

Students will not go back to learning until they feel safe in the school environment. This includes having the opportunity to talk about their own reactions, or any other information which might be helpful in creating feelings of safety.

Help students gain a sense of what is yet to come. The National Organization of Victim Assistance speaks of "predict and prepare". A key element in what makes events traumatic is that people felt out of control, and that things were not predictable. Do whatever is possible to give people a sense of what is to come.

"Normalize" for people the usual reactions to trauma. It is not unusual for people to have physical, emotional and cognitive symptoms to traumatic events. Often people think they are going crazy or "losing it". Just knowing that their reactions are not uncommon can make them less apt to feel like the symptoms are just one more sign that things are out of control.

Give students and staff opportunity for putting words to their reactions **and fears**. Moving the experience from the memory center to the language center of the brain begins to give a sense of mastery over something which has seemed out of control and overpowering. These might be informal times of processing or may be interventions or debriefings held by professionals who have expertise in the field of trauma.

Find the means to allow for personal action. We sometimes feel less immobilized if we are able to take some kind of corrective action, even if it is minimal.

Do not have peer helpers or other student organizations be involved in leading the discussions for students. That is like having the walking wounded help the newly injured. All students need to be supported and not be expected to provide support to others. Besides, these kinds of events are overwhelming to nearly everyone and are beyond the scope of what student self-help program training addresses.

Preparing for terrorism

- Always be aware of your surroundings. The very nature of terrorism suggests little or no warning of an attack.
- Hold a household meeting to discuss what members would do and how they would communicate in the event of an incident.
- Check with school officials to determine their plans for an emergency and procedures to reunite children with parents and caregivers.
- Apartment residents should discuss with building managers steps to be taken during an emergency.
- People with special needs should discuss their emergency plans with family, employers, and friends.
- Take precautions when traveling. Be aware of conspicuous or unusual behavior. Do not accept packages from strangers. Do not leave luggage unattended. Unusual behavior, suspicious packages, and strange devices should be promptly reported to the police or a security officer.
- Do not be afraid to move or leave if you feel uncomfortable or if something doesn't seem right.
- Note where emergency exits are in buildings you frequent. Know the location and availability of hard hats. Be familiar with different types of fire extinguishers and how to locate them.
- Note where exits are when you enter unfamiliar buildings. Plan how to get out of a building, subway, or congested public area. Note where staircases are located. Note heavy or breakable objects that could move, fall, or break in an explosion.
- Assemble a disaster supply kit at home and learn first aid. Separate the supplies you would take if you had to evacuate quickly, and put them in a ready-to-go backpack or container.

Assemble a disaster supply kit

Be sure to include:

- A battery-powered radio with extra batteries.
- Non-perishable food and drinking water.
- A roll of duct tape and scissors.
- A first-aid kit.
- Sanitation supplies, including soap, water, and bleach.
- Plastic for doors, windows, and vents for the room in which you will shelter; this should be an internal room where you can block out air that may contain hazardous chemical or biological agents. To save critical time during an emergency, sheeting should be pre-measured and cut for each opening.

In the event of a red (severe risk) alert

- Avoid public gathering places such as sports arenas.
- Follow official instructions about restrictions to normal activities.
- Contact employer to determine status of work.
- Monitor radio and TV for possible advisories or warnings.
- Prepare to take protective actions, such as sheltering or evacuation, if instructed to do so by public officials.