



The Anniversary of 9/11;

Parents Can Help Kids Cope

Since September 11, 2001, Americans have been thrust into a global climate of anger, fear, violence and war. Our children are trying to make sense of the ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and know that the threat of terrorism continues. Now, the approaching anniversary of 9/11 and the media images that come with it may trigger a wide range of emotions in children, whether they reveal them to us or not.

Signs of trouble coping with those emotions may include: fearfulness about leaving the house or going to school; headache/stomachache/other physical complaints; loss of interest in friends or activities; difficulty concentrating; persistent nightmares; frequent worrying; talk of death or suicide; increased tearfulness, irritability or anger; and new fears about such things as airplanes, tall buildings, tunnels or being alone. Children with mental health problems or those who have experienced past trauma may be the most affected

Talking to kids about their feelings is a good way to help them cope with their anxieties surrounding September 11. Helping them take positive steps to work out those feelings is even better. However, let children acknowledge the anniversary in their own way. Some children may express a lot of interest, while others may ignore it altogether. Don't force children to participate in ceremonies or memorials, or overload them with information.

Other tips for parents:

- To deflect the anxiety of the day, keep kids occupied by doing something positive. See what ideas you can come up with together and help kids develop an action plan. Your decision to support them in the activity could be just what they need to deal with the anniversary of this tragic event.
- Many schools will observe the anniversary in one way or another. Talk with your child's teacher to learn what may be planned.

- Avoid the television as much as possible. The visual images can be especially damaging to young children. Schedule an alternate activity during the news hour without calling attention to your real concern. A walk around the block, homework, a good movie on the VCR or a fun dinner around the table won't make kids feel like they're missing something.
- Acknowledge that bad things happen even to good people. We can't always explain why. Say that it's difficult for you to understand too.
- Preschoolers need comforting and frequent reassurance that they're safe - make sure you give it to them. Provide extra comfort and contact by discussing their fears, staying in touch during the day and giving lots of hugs.
- Expect questions about the event and the continuing threat of terrorism from children in elementary school. Try to answer them in simple and clear language. Be honest. False reassurance doesn't help this age group.
- With preteens and teenagers, plan for shared time in front of a reliable national newscast. The events of 9/11, the continuing acts of terrorism in the Middle East, the threat of terrorism here at home and the ongoing conflict in Iraq will all be discussed in school. As a result, your youngster may be more ready to talk when he or she gets home than you'd guess. This is a good opportunity for conversation.
- Also, be sure to take care of yourself. Children model their behavior on the adults around them. If you need to talk about your emotions, talk with someone (friend, family, religious advisor, or professional). If you need support, ask for it. It can also set a good example of coping for your children.

Information provided courtesy of the National Mental Health Association