

Riverside Trauma Center

CHILDREN AND TRAUMA

Children respond to traumatic violence in a variety of ways; however there are several typical responses. These responses vary, depending on numerous factors, some of which are: the child's age, whether the child knew the individuals involved, and how 'graphic' the violence was. Some common responses to trauma include:

- Concerns about fearing that the person (people) suffered
- Repeatedly visualizing the crime/incident in their minds
- Constant attempts to tell and retell the story of the crime/incident
- Need to reenact the crime/incident through play
- A desire to seek revenge (for those who knew the victim(s))
- Feelings of guilt for not having intervened or prevented the crime

For some children, particularly those who knew the victim(s), signals of grief after a violent crime/incident include:

- Fear of death
- Fear of being left alone or sleeping alone
- A need to be with people who have been through the same experience
- Difficulty concentrating
- Drop in grades (during the school year)
- Physical complaints (headaches/stomachaches)
- Bed-wetting
- Nightmares
- Fear of sleep
- Clingy behavior (wanting to be with and around parents more often)

What you can do to help children who have witnessed violence:

- Allow your child to talk about what he/she experienced or heard about
- Know that younger children may prefer to "draw" about their experiences
- Ask them what they saw and heard and what they think about the experience. Help them to label feelings, and normalize their reactions ("that must have been pretty scary. It wouldn't surprise me if you keep thinking about it.")
- Spend some extra time with your child: have dinner together, make sure to keep bedtime routines.
- Remind your child of things he/she likes to do to help feel better when upset (playing, reading, etc.).
- Keep routines as much the same as possible in the aftermath of an unpleasant event. Children count on routines and structure.

If you have concerns that your child may be having serious responses to trauma, you should speak to a counselor.