

*HOW DO I DEAL
WITH MY CHILD'S
ANXIETY?*

*HOW DO I TALK
TO MY CHILD ABOUT
VIOLENCE?*

**PARENT
PREPARATION
MANUAL**

*HOW DO I
KEEP MYSELF
CALM?*

*WHAT
ABOUT
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**Parenting
in
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Times**

*WHAT
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*WHO CAN I TALK
TO ABOUT WHAT'S
HAPPENING?*

Caring For Children, founded in 1985 by Samantha Grier, MSW, addresses the emotional and psychological needs of children in crisis. Using innovative techniques, methods and materials, Caring For Children was able to reach and help hundreds of thousands of traumatized children living in orphanages, foster homes, family shelters, disaster areas and war zones. The primary intervention, accompanied by staff training and the development of a series of child welfare training manuals, is the gift of a Teddy Bear as a psychological tool, which acts as emergency medicine to a traumatized child.

The Teddy Bear is more than a toy. It is a special friend that represents love and caring and connection. It provides a very important source of soothing and comfort that induces positive feelings in a child that is frightened, lonely and insecure. As such, it is a special psychological tool that induces a sense of wellbeing regardless of the difficulties the child is experiencing. This strengthens the child emotionally and enables the child to better deal with the reality of his or her life. Thus the Teddy Bear is an antidote to the heightened anxiety of living with violence or exposure to an actual traumatic incident.

The Teddy Bear is emergency medicine for emotional wounds resulting from living with the anxiety. The Teddy Bear reduces effectively a child's level of anxiety. This is the first significant step in the healing process. Because the Teddy Bear is a constant companion under the child's control, it helps the child feel less vulnerable, less helpless and less alone.

The Teddy Bear is also seen as a special friend with whom a shy or silent child can share worries, fears or upset. This enables adults to communicate more effectively with a withdrawn child. By asking indirectly about how the Teddy Bear feels, one can get a better sense of how the child is doing. The Teddy Bear is thus an aid to better communication and a closer relationship which in turn enables the child to better utilize the techniques and methods described through out this manual.

Caring For Children has worked with police departments across the United States including SFPD, NYPD and LAPD as well as hospitals, homeless shelters and family agencies. The governments of Mexico, Brazil, Peru, El Salvador, and Bolivia among others have brought Caring For Children's programs directly into their child welfare system. In conjunction with Casa Alianza in Honduras during Hurricane Mitch, Caring For Children was part of an effort that brought Teddy Bears to 500,000 youngsters made homeless by the storm. Working with Non Governmental Organization (NGO), Caring For Children brought therapeutic Teddy Bears to children living in Kosovo and throughout the Middle East.

PARENT PREPARATION MANUAL

Parenting in Challenging Times

Introduction

Parenting, always a challenging task, has become more so as violence infects schools and neighborhoods. These problems have been the focus of much media attention. Parents are often confused as to how and how much they should talk with their children about this. Many question their children's exposure to graphic pictures and news reports that intrude into the family home. Thankfully, most of our children have not been exposed directly to the traumatic events. However, many of them have been affected by either by media coverage of these events, or broadcasts of threats of possible events. Children are sensitive to their environments. They are very aware of how the important adults in their lives react. Notice how the increased levels of violence have affected you. Once you begin to pay attention as to how you are affected, you can learn how you can help your children understand and cope better.

Traumatic events are sudden and threatening for both children and adults. Trauma upsets our assumptions that the world is a safe place that we are able to control or at least predict. Children's reactions to trauma are often quite intense since they may feel helpless and often do not understand what is going on around them. Since trauma can upset the delicate balance of parent-child relationships, your child's confidence that you will be able to protect him or her may be disturbed. At the core of being a good parent is the ability to protect your child from harm. This ability may be severely undermined.

How Do Children React to Traumatic Events?

Since your child's reactions to a traumatic event will be strongly influenced by your behavior as a parent, you and other significant adults will be role models for your child. Your behavior shows your child how to interpret the situation and how to react to it. While older children may be less

dependent on parents' reactions, friends, teachers, media, as well as you do influence them.

Children react to trauma in different ways. The intensity of their reactions is related to the level of exposure to the traumatic event. The closer your child is to the event (either geographically or via some personal relationship) the greater the probability your child will be affected. Children can also be worried by media reports. Children do not always show outward signs of distress. Sometimes their reactions are more subtle. Familiarize yourself with some of the typical reactions of children to traumatic events: Typical reactions to a traumatic event fall into three developmental age groups:

Early Childhood (infancy to five year olds)

Typical reactions include:

- ✓ Clinging to parents
- ✓ Crying
- ✓ Regressive behaviors (returning to an earlier period of development)
- ✓ Wetting bed or pants
- ✓ Finger sucking
- ✓ Fear of the dark.

Frequently, children will play games that reenact the details of the event again and again. It is through this dramatic play that children are often able to work through the traumatic event and gain a sense of control over it.

Middle childhood (six to eleven year olds)

Typical reactions include:

- ✓ Anger and aggressiveness
- ✓ Avoidance of subjects related to the trauma
- ✓ Regressive behavior (returning to an earlier period of development)
- ✓ Isolation or turning inward

- ✓ Difficulties in concentrating and studying
- ✓ Younger children in this age group also may use dramatic play to reenact the traumatic event.

Adolescence (12 – 18 year olds)

Behavior varies a great deal depending on the level of maturity of the adolescent. Reactions for many teens are similar to those of adults while others may be more similar to the reactions of younger children.

It is possible to observe a range of behaviors including:

- ✓ Increased risk taking behavior
- ✓ Isolation
- ✓ Antisocial behavior
- ✓ Increased use of addictive substances.
- ✓ The behavior of adolescents that have directly experienced trauma can be more extreme and impulsive. Sometimes they clearly provoke or ignore danger.
- ✓ Reactions to trauma may also aggravate existing conflicts between parents and adolescents.

Remember, children do not need to be directly exposed to the trauma in order to experience distress. Some children may exhibit some of these reactions after merely watching an event on television or hearing about the threat of violence. It is important for parents to develop sensitivity to their child's distress signals and to communicate with them about what is making them anxious or afraid. Remember, your child or adolescent may experience significant distress even if they do not express it outwardly. That being said, let us remember that most **children and adolescents show remarkable resilience.**

Resilience

Most youngsters show remarkable resilience in the face of exposure to trauma or the threat of a traumatic event. Resilience refers to the ability to bounce back in the face of threatening or traumatic events, and to return to normal functioning. Factors that influence your child's

Taking Care of Yourself

The following tips will nurture and sustain you so that you can be stronger and more mentally available when you need to be solidly present for the people you love.

Physically:

1. Being rested is critical. Your first priority is getting enough sleep and taking breaks.
2. Stop to breathe or meditate (clear your mind) during the day as much as possible.
3. Drink plenty of liquids. Dehydration causes headaches and other discomforts.
4. Make sure you are not holding your breath. Breathe deeply as often as you remember to do so. Deep breathing provides needed oxygen to your brain.

Emotionally:

1. Nurture yourself so you will have emotional reserves.
2. Journal or meditate when feeling stressed or anxious.
3. Connect with friends and family for mutual support.

Mentally:

1. Avoid television news programs, especially repetitious news reporting. Try to minimize reading newspapers as well.
2. Note and accept negative or intrusive thoughts. Then dismiss them with an acknowledgment.
3. Start planting positive thought so that flowers will grow instead of weeds. Reading positive material or going to an uplifting event builds you up.
4. Stop powerless worry as a waste of time and a drain on your energy.

Spiritually:

1. Connect spiritually with a Higher Power that is larger than you. Go to nature or the source of your spiritual beliefs.
2. If you are comfortable with a personal God, connect with prayer or a journal.
3. If you are open to a deeper connection attend a religious service.
4. Regular attendance provides another source of support.
5. Explore a creative project or journal your thoughts on paper.

ability to cope include: the degree of exposure to the event, the amount of support available to your child as well as your child's general level of functioning. A sensitive environment where the needs of your child are understood will support your child to continue to grow and develop the necessary strengths and skills for the special challenges of today's world.

How Can I Help My Child?

Realize that you also may be affected by events that you have been exposed to or experienced via the media. Repetitive reports heighten the intensity of the perceived threat of trauma. Notice if you are experiencing some of the common symptoms of tension or stress, such as: difficulties sleeping, excessive worrying, headaches, forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, or fatigue.

As parents, be aware of your own needs. Attending to your own needs at these times will help not only you, but also helps your child. The calmer you are, the better you will be able to respond to your child in a calm manner. This will promote a sense of security and safety in your child.

How Do I Talk with My Child About Traumatic Events?

First find out what your child has learned from friends, at school and from television. Encourage your child to ask questions. This gives the best clues to what is on your child's mind. When you do respond it is best to keep information simple and geared to your child's level.

Address both cognitive and emotional aspects of the event. On the **cognitive** level your child needs reliable, honest information. It should be sufficient to answer the questions your child is asking, without adding details. Do not assume that the question is larger than it is. A simple response is best. Give your child an opportunity to ask more questions. This will help you understand how your child thinks and to help untangle confusing messages and conflicting information that they may have picked up outside the home. Make sure your child understands words that are used a lot. Restate what you think your child already understands.

One of the best ways to make your child feel safe on an **emotional** level is to maintain a regular routine. This routine will be reassuring to your child. During uncertain times, or periods of increased threat routine provides your child with predictability and a sense of control over his or her environment. Safety and control are two key elements in the development of personal resilience.

It helps if a child is able to express strong feelings, and emotions. A calm and accepting environment will encourage your child to share feelings. Even if your child's fears seem silly it is important to take your child seriously. A frightened child is already feeling vulnerable and helpless. If you belittle his or her fears or concerns, he or she may feel ashamed. Your child needs to know that fears are natural and normal and most of all acceptable to you.

Tips for Parenting Young Children

Allowing your child to express himself non-verbally, through drawing or dramatic play is often very helpful. The **COLOR YOUR FEELINGS WORKBOOK** is a good tool in helping your child express his or her emotions. This workbook is particularly helpful for children ages five to ten. The **COLOR YOUR FEELINGS WORKBOOK** helps your child express feelings in a picture when they cannot put it into words. Pay attention to your child's drawings as well as his or her body language while drawing. You may receive many clues as to what is troubling your child and how you can help.

A special stuffed animal or doll may also comfort young children. A teddy bear, for example, is another tool that helps traumatized children. Children often bond with their special stuffed animal, which is always available to them. When they are lonely, afraid, or under stress children may feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feeling with their teddy bear. The stuffed animal or doll is always with them and under their control, which is reassuring. The teddy bear can provide solace, comfort and a hug when needed. It is highly recommended that you provide your child with a Teddy Bear or some special soft object your child could use to comfort himself or herself.

How to Help Children with Specific Symptoms?

Fears:

Fear is an integral part of the childhood experience. Children often feel vulnerable and powerless under the best of circumstances. Often a child must handle events he or she doesn't understand or know how to cope with.

Many fears, that seem unfounded to a parent are very serious and real to a child.

What can you as a parent do to help your child with their fears?

- ✓ **Show that you understand his fears** — Reiterate that fears are completely normal.
- ✓ **Talk about what is going on in the country and the world.**

Make sure the information suits your child's age and maturity level. Use a reassuring tone of voice while stressing the many positive resources your child, and the family as a whole, has for coping with the situation.

- ✓ Read your child children's books that address emotions and particularly fears through the characters and through the story. Try to make reading interactive. This is an opportunity to learn more about your child. Reading the story will allow your child to identify with the characters who have coped with their fears.
- ✓ Let your child know you are with them and that they do not have to handle their fears alone.
- ✓ Monitor what your child is watching on TV. Reduce exposure to news or other programs with violence.
- ✓ Encourage your child to express him or herself in an art project.
- ✓ Encourage your child to talk to a third party about what he or she is feeling. This may include a favorite stuffed animal such as a teddy bear.
- ✓ Share your experience of dealing with the event with your child if you think it may be helpful.

Parenting Tips

During times of stress it is especially important to provide comforting contact with your children regardless of age. Here are some tips that may support both of you during difficult times:

1. Initiate loving physical contact with your children. This may vary by age, cuddles for the youngest ones, hugs and or pats for school aged children, reassuring pats or handgrips with older adolescents.
2. Maintain eye contact with your children when talking to them about important matters. This may mean holding little ones on your lap, kneeling down for older children or standing or sitting directly across from teens when you are talking to them.
3. Help your children bond with extended family members, neighbors and friends of the family so that their circle of support grows.
4. Plan family activities to provide a reservoir of good feelings that can buffer the impact of bad ones. This could include simple board games at home, visiting a place they enjoy, providing special treats on an excursion.
5. Reserve quiet private time with each child no matter what age. Even fifteen or twenty minutes a day makes a tremendous difference to the security of your child.

- ✓ Let your child know that you love and value them no matter what.

Silent or Withdrawn Children:

Reserved or quiet children require special understanding and additional patience. Include the child when family members, neighbors and friends are discussing the incident. This allows for the child to see a variety of reactions and feelings.

Encourage your quiet child to express him or herself in nonverbal ways such as drawing or writing. Acknowledge and accept the child's feelings without judgment or blame. Give your child extra attention. This may be harder in the short run but pay off in the long run.

Difficult Bedtime:

Bedtime often is the time of day when a child who is doing well during the day, seems to fall apart. Children who have high levels of stress and anxiety related to traumatic events may have difficulty at bedtime. These difficulties may include refusing to go to bed, difficulty falling asleep and waking up during the night as well as frequent nightmares.

Some suggestions in dealing with difficult bedtime may include:

- ✓ Developing a bedtime routine that includes a regular time for winding down. Include a ritual of washing and tooth brushing followed by reading a book or singing a lullaby or other bedtime song. Children enjoy a back rub or a cuddle. Allow enough time for these “tucking in” activities, but don’t forget to set limits.
- ✓ Spending extra time with your child during the day may also alleviate some of the problems at night. Difficulties at bedtime may be your child's way of saying that he is not spending enough time with you during the day.
- ✓ Allowing the child to sleep with his brother or sister temporarily may also be helpful. The presence of others can be reassuring to the child and helpful in reducing some of the anxiety that contributes to the sleep disturbance.

Regressive Behaviors:

Children under stress often demonstrate regressive behaviors. Your child may go back to an earlier less mature pattern of behavior that he or she had previously outgrown. This is absolutely normal. Be assured that your child will return to mature behavior in time.

Regressive behaviors may include:

- ✓ Bedwetting
- ✓ Clinging to parent
- ✓ Thumb or finger sucking.

These behaviors, all signs of anxiety, can be short lived. Do not punish your child or reinforce this behavior by overreacting. Focus on the skills the child has retained and praise the more mature behaviors. Tell your child that it is normal to feel nervous. Let the child know in words that you love and value him or her regardless of the regressive behavior.

Some Advice for Parents During Troubled Times

- ✓ Acknowledge your child’s feelings
- ✓ Include your child in all activities
- ✓ Do not leave your child at home with a baby sitter for long periods of time
- ✓ Give your child extra attention.
- ✓ Acknowledge and cope with your own feelings.
- ✓ Talk about your own anger, rage or feelings of helplessness with a safe person.
- ✓ Finding or creating a support group with other adults is very helpful.
- ✓ Help older children identify ways in which they can help others.
- ✓ If your child’s symptoms do not diminish in a few weeks, turn to professional help. A psychological consultation or evaluation will help you decide how to best help your child.

And remember! MOST CHILDREN AND ADULTS ARE RESILIENT!

- ✓ Resilience can be strengthened and supported by providing a safe and understanding environment that allows for the expression of all emotions.
- ✓ Focus on things you and your child can do that make you feel calm and safe.
- ✓ Helping others, and reaching out to family, friends and community helps to build resilience.

Samantha Grier, MSW, has served as Founder and Director of Caring for Children, Inc. since its inception in 1985. Her background includes a history of relevant academic and professional accomplishments including over fifteen years experience in direct services to children and families in a variety of social welfare settings.

Ms. Grier holds a BA in Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and an MSW from Columbia University. She was awarded a fellowship in Child Development and Community Consultation by the National Institute of Mental Health. Later she studied Social Policy and Planning in a Columbia University doctoral program, and earned a Certificate in Community Affairs as a member of New York City's Advisory Board Number Five.

Ms. Grier then designed and conducted a popular series of seminars for parents, which led both to the founding of The Center for Family and Child Development, a pioneer program in parent education, and Parents Place, a parental resource center in White Plains. She served as director of that program and later as consultant to the replication of Parents Place in San Francisco.

Ms. Grier held faculty positions in Social Welfare, Child Development and Parenting at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA; Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT; Pace University, White Plains, NY; and New School for Social Research, New York City. In addition, she wrote a monthly column for *First Teacher* and self-published *Building Blocks For A Non-Violent Childhood*. She was a speaker at the World Federation for Mental Health Mexico City Conference in Mexico City, a regional conference in Guadalajara, a national American Humanistic Society conference, and several regional conferences of the Child Welfare League of America.

Dr. Naomi Baum completed her Master's degree in school psychology and her PhD in counseling and child development at Bryn Mawr College. She has been a consulting psychologist for elementary, junior highs, high schools and pre-schools for over twenty years. She has also taught psychology at several colleges and universities, both in the United States and in Israel and is currently the director of the Resilience Unit and the National School Resilience Project at the Israel Center for the Treatment of Psycho-Trauma, Jerusalem. Her focus has been developing program to build resilience in the community at large and more specifically on the entire developmental span of childhood from early childhood through high school, for students and staff alike. Programs include workshops for teachers, day care center directors and workers, school principals, guidance counselors and psychologists, student screening, and in-school treatment groups for children.