

Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth after the Bombings

Bombings are extremely frightening experiences, and the days, weeks, and months following can be very stressful. How long it takes to recover will depend on what happened to your family during and after this event. Those who experienced physical injury, witnessed or knew people who were there, worried about the safety of family members and friends, or loss loved ones may have a more challenging recovery. Over time, some youth and adults will return to normal routines, while others may struggle. Children and teens may react differently to the bombings depending on their age and prior experiences. Even if you are having your own reactions try to understand and support the reactions of your children. Children's reactions to the bombings are strongly influenced by how parents, relatives, teachers, and other caregivers respond to the event. They often turn to these adults for information, comfort, and help. There are many common reactions after mass violence. These generally diminish with time, but knowing about them can help.

Common Reactions

- Feelings of shock, anger, fear, and anxiety about the safety of self and others
- Fears that another bombing will occur
- Changes in behavior:
 - o Increase in activity level
 - o Decrease in concentration and attention
 - o Increase in irritability and anger
 - o Sadness, grief, and/or withdrawal
 - o Radical changes in attitudes and expectations for the future
 - o Increases or decreases in sleep and appetite
 - o Engaging in harmful habits like drinking, using drugs, or doing things that are harmful to self or others
 - o Lack of interest in usual activities, including how one spends time with friends
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Changes in school- or work-related habits
- An intense focus on the bombings (talking repeatedly about it)
- Strong reactions to reminders of the bombings (seeing those who were present at the bombings, media images, smoke, glass breaking)
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (loud noises, explosions, screaming, or sirens)

Things I Can Do

- Take care of yourself. Do your best to drink plenty of water, eat regularly, and get enough sleep and exercise.
- Help each other. Take time with other adult relatives, friends, or members of the community to talk or support each other.
- Put off major decisions. Avoid making any unnecessary life-altering decisions during this time.
- Give yourself a break. Take time to rest and do things that you like to do.

Things I Can Do for My Child

- Spend time talking with your children. Let them know that they are welcome to ask questions and express their concerns and feelings. Remain open to new questions and provide helpful information and support. You might not know all the answers and it is OK to say that. At the same time, don't push them to talk if they don't want to. Let them know you are available when they are ready.
- Find time to have these conversations. When you eat together or sit together in the evening, talk about what is happening in the family and the community. Try not to have conversations close to bedtime.
- Promote your children's self-care. Encourage your children to drink enough water, eat regularly, rest, and exercise. Let them know it is OK not to talk about the bombings if they don't want to.
- Help children feel safe. Talk with children about safety concerns, and discuss what public officials are doing in the community to promote safety. Encourage your child to tell their concerns to you or to teachers.
- Maintain expectations or "rules." Stick with family rules, such as curfews, checking in with you while with friends, and keeping up with homework and chores. On a time-limited basis, keep a closer watch on your teen's activities. Assure them that the extra check-in is temporary, just until things stabilize.
- Address acting out behaviors. Help children/teens understand that "acting out" behaviors are a dangerous way to express strong feelings over what happened. Examples of "acting out" include intentionally cutting oneself, driving recklessly, engaging in unprotected sex, and abusing drugs or alcohol. You can say something like, "Many children and adults feel out of control and angry right now. They might even think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It's very normal to feel that way—but it's not a good idea to act on it." Talk with children about other ways of coping with feelings (distraction, exercise, writing in a journal, spending time with others).
- Limit media exposure. Protect your child from too much media coverage about the, including Internet, radio, television, or other technologies (e.g., texting, Facebook, Twitter). Explain that media coverage and social media can trigger fears of the bombings happening again and also spread rumors. Let them know they can distract themselves with activities or can talk to you about how they are feeling.
- Be patient. Children may be more distracted and need added help with chores or homework once school is in session.

- Manage reminders. Help children identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings) and clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it. When children experience a reminder, they can say or think, “I got upset because the police car sirens reminded me of the bombings. But now I'm safe.” Some reminders could relate to the loss of friends and/or family (photos of the person, music listened to together, locations of time spent together). Help your child cope with these loss reminders and provide them extra comfort during these times.
- Monitor changes in relationships. Explain to children that strains on relationships can happen.
- Emphasize that everyone needs family and friends for support during this time. Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Encourage tolerance for how your family and friends may be recovering or feeling differently. Accept responsibility for your own feelings, by saying “I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I was having a bad day.” Address radical changes in attitudes and expectations for the future. Explain to children that changes in people’s attitudes are common and tend to be temporary after a tragedy like this. These feelings can include feeling scared, angry, and vengeful. Find ways to help them talk about their feelings.
- Involve adults in your children’s lives. If there has been a serious injury, death in the family, death of a close friend, or if your child is having difficulties, let your child’s teacher or other caring adults know so that they can help.
- Empower your child to get involved in their medical care. For children or teens with injuries and long-term medical needs, help them participate in medical discussions and decisions as much as possible. Have them ask questions and give opinions about different procedures. Teens are especially concerned about their physical appearance, fitting in, and their privacy. Talk with them about their concerns, problem-solve ways to address them, and respect their privacy.
- Seek professional help. If teens have continued difficulties for a couple of months after the bombings, parents should consult a trusted doctor or mental health professional.