

## Some Guidelines for Parents:

### How to Talk with your Son or Daughter after a Traumatic Event

1. Provide support by listening to and acknowledging all feelings and concerns. Although you may want to briefly share your reactions to the event, your purpose is not to talk about how you feel, but to listen to the feelings of your son or daughter.
  - Acknowledge the event.
  - You may need to ask how your son or daughter is feeling: you can't make assumptions about their reactions. People react in different ways and with varying levels of intensity.
  - Accept whatever feelings are expressed. Allow the expression to occur without having to provide justification. Why your son or daughter feels a certain way is not important at this time.
  - In addition to feelings of sadness, other feelings that are important to address are anger, guilt and blame.  
*(Anger at the deceased is a common reaction that can be especially confusing and misunderstood).*  
*(Guilt is another feeling that can interfere with healing. Feeling responsible in some way is common and should be addressed directly).*  
*(Blame is an expression of feeling, but one that can stall the grief process. Gently encourage your son or daughter from assigning responsibility to exploring their reactions).*
  - It is helpful to point out that there is no one right way to feel: a range of feelings is usually expressed and this is normal and appropriate. It may also be useful to explain that the intensity of grief reactions diminishes with time. (The first few days are the hardest).
2. It is common to search for the “whys” of an event. This search for answers is important for we are trying to understand and gain control over the event. While we need to ask why, remember to move away from the circumstances to an appreciation of what the person's life has meant. To encourage this, ask them to share memories of the deceased.
3. Remember to pay attention to verbal and nonverbal communication. Sometimes those who are most distressed say the least. While numbness is normal grief reaction, silence may also hide overwhelming feelings that might be less overwhelming as they are put into words.

Some suggestions:

- Listening to music
- Drawing pictures
- Writing or journal entries

4. Remember that each person expresses grief in an individual and idiosyncratic way.
5. It is important to maintain daily routines. In times of traumatic events, it is important to maintain normal routines when appropriate. Consistency provides a sense of comfort during this time of upheaval.
6. Touch can communicate more than words.

### **When to Seek Help**

Some Warning Signs:

- Apathy and withdrawal from family and friends
- Indications of alcohol or drug abuse
- Significant drop in school performance
- Preoccupation with violence or death
- “Unusually” good behavior and the need to please
- Violent mood swings
- Talking or joking about killing oneself

### **Where to go for Help**

Family Service Center in your community

Mental health profession recommended by your pediatrician

Josselyn Center for Mental Health.....847-441-5600

Haven (24 Hour Hotline).....847-446-5606

Contact the Social Work Department at New Trier High School for additional referrals  
847-446-2251