

I-CART

INDIANA CRISIS ASSISTANCE RESPONSE TEAM

DISCUSSING TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Healing from trauma is not serendipitous; it does not simply occur with the passing of time or because children are inherently resilient. There is, in fact, nothing simple about childhood trauma. When ignored, the memories and distress do not go away. (Monahan, 1993)

Talking with children about traumatic events is beneficial in helping them move beyond the event. Adults also have reactions that need to be acknowledged and addressed. The following suggestions and questions can be beneficial in the crisis intervention process for both children and adults. The questions and discussion can be adjusted for all age groups. Giving children and adults the opportunity to discuss an event through these types of questions can greatly reduce the impact and/or preoccupation with the event. The crisis intervention process and protocol helps individuals:

1. **Develop a sense of safety and security** ...reminding them that they are safe and connecting them with others during the discussion will help develop this feeling
2. **Ventilate** their feelings and reactions and have those feelings and reactions **validated** by hearing the reactions of others
3. **Help predict** what other future reactions may be, both positive and distressing and help prepare for those reactions

Discussion Hints:

1. Anger and reactions: let individuals know that anger is a common reaction.
2. Normalize and affirm a broad range of reactions. . Affirm that almost any reaction or feeling that they might have is not unusual given the magnitude of the situation. Affirm that different people react in different ways. They may experience changes in:
 - a. Physical, cognitive, behavioral, emotional and spiritual domains
 - b. Differences in sleeping, eating, behaviors, concentrating, etc.
 - c. Short-term memory, attention, processing and recent learning is often impaired when a traumatic event has occurred. Disorganization and confusion may occur.
3. Facilitate the discussion: Ask questions only to facilitate the flow of discussion

4. Clarify what is being said
5. Echo words or phrases that are used in the discussion
6. Find new or alternative words that repeat or enhance what is being said
7. Summarize and indicate how common the reactions are
8. Give accurate information...if you are hearing things that are not known to be true...talk about the importance of reacting to what is known and not responding to rumors
9. Personal values and beliefs...keep personal values, beliefs, biases and judgments to yourself and avoid imposing them on others. . If pressed indicate that there will be all type of reactions voiced by individuals
10. Reflect back or repeat what the individual has told you
11. Accept feelings, fears, and concerns. Acceptance helps keep these out in the open
12. Helpful phrases:
 - "I'm glad you are sharing these thoughts... it helps us all to understand our own reactions"
 - "Your reaction is not an uncommon response to such an event"
 - Avoid using the phrase, " You shouldn't feel that way"
13. Be a listener and a discussion facilitator
14. Assess your own reactions to the situation. Be aware of your own feelings and reactions. You will not necessarily be sharing these feelings but you should be aware of them because they will influence your perceptions, reactions, and responses toward the questions and behaviors of others
15. Sharing of Information. It is important to make sure individuals are reacting to the actual information rather than rumors.
16. Identifying Suicide Ideation. Do not make a personal judgment on the seriousness of the ideation.
17. Individuals in Distress. Make no judgment on how an individual is reacting or the genuineness of the reaction. Emotional reactions may be triggered that are related to other situations in the individual's life. Emotional reactions may include anger, crying, withdrawal or other behavior issues.
18. Reassuring. Assure individuals that it would be very unusual for something like this to happen here and that the events of the day have resulted in our community taking a very protective stance to make sure nothing does happen again.

Questions to use in talking with others:

The following questions are ones that can help children, adolescents, and adults begin to talk and process what they are experiencing. Not all questions need to be asked or answered. These question-stems are designed to help the person to begin to talk.

1. How did they learn about the event?

2. Where were they when they heard it?
3. Who were they with or where were they when they first saw or heard about the event?
4. What did they see, hear or smell?
5. What did they do? How did they react at the time?
6. What were their first thoughts? What do they remember the most?
7. How did they feel? What emotional reactions did they have? What physical reactions did they have?
8. What was the most disturbing moment they had?
9. What keeps coming back to them?
10. What reactions have they seen in others?
11. Since they first heard about it, what are their reactions now?
12. What are they most worried about or afraid of?
13. What is the hardest thing to understand about this situation?
14. What are the things they do to help them feel safe or deal with their reactions?
15. Who are the people they can talk with?

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