

After the Crisis: Helping Children Heal and Fostering Resilience

It is not unusual for children to continue to show signs of stress in the first few weeks after a crisis has been resolved. Reactions and recovery may vary with the child's direct exposure to the crisis, age, past experience with trauma, coping skills, and network of caring adults. Most youngsters, however, will return to their usual state of physical and emotional health within 4–6 weeks.

How can adults help?

Parents and teachers may expect that children and teens will experience a variety of emotions in the aftermath of crisis. They might include:

- Relief
- Elation
- Exhaustion
- Helplessness
- Anger
- Sadness
- Worry
- Fear

While some youngsters may talk about these feelings, others may communicate their emotions through behavior or physical symptoms.

Adult support is key to helping children cope with the aftermath of a crisis event. Parents and educators can help children heal by:

- Being an available and visible presence
- Returning to routines while allowing for flexibility
- Modeling effective strategies for expressing feelings and coping with stress
- Teaching children how to use familiar coping strategies such as:
 - Talking about feelings
 - Eating properly
 - Getting adequate rest
 - Exercising regularly
 - Engaging in fun, positive, productive activities
 - Spending time with friends and family
- Allowing children to tell their stories in words, play, puppetry, pictures, poetry, music—whatever activity the child selects for self-expression

- Accepting that children may return to younger behaviors while encouraging and supporting age-appropriate activity
- Limiting TV and media exposure to the aftermath of the event, including follow-up interviews, ongoing investigations, legal proceedings, etc.
 - Young children may fear that the incident is recurring when they see replays on television.
- Avoiding discussions of blame or anger about the incident in the presence of children