

HELPING YOUR CHILD THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES

Recent local tragedies have hit pretty hard. We operate within our daily lives inside a necessary illusionary bubble of safety. This helps us attend to daily tasks without feeling overwhelmed by the anxiety that we or our loved ones could experience something tragic in any given moment. Events like the horrific shooting at Borderline, along with the devastating and destructive fires, pop this bubble and now suddenly, horrible things are all too possible. So close to home, so very close. Please be aware, as I know you already are, that even if your child did not know someone that was involved in the Borderline tragedy, or did not directly experience a loss or scare from the fires, the possibility that something like these events could happen to themselves or someone they love in any given moment, might be in the forefront of their thoughts.

Sad and tragic events also open the door to the dark room in our minds where we have stuffed away past sadness's, losses, and other tragic and painful experiences. When this heavy door opens, all these sad and difficult thoughts tumble out and can surprise and overwhelm us. These can include seemingly unrelated memories of other losses and difficult times, such as the long ago loss of a pet, sickness of a relative, a grandparent that died before they were born, the betrayal of a best friend, etc... Awareness of this process can help us acknowledge these sad memories and thoughts so we can help our child tuck them away more neatly this time into the back part of their mind where they are kept safe.

How to help your child:

We cannot make our child's difficult feelings instantly disappear or prevent them

from happening, though we can help them learn how to deal with them successfully. This is one of the best gifts you can give your child; the skills necessary to process and deal with difficult and painful emotions. This lesson is enduring, crucial and, possibly lifesaving. By helping your child process difficult emotions, now, while they are still in your protective care, you will help them learn how to deal with future tragedies, devastating events and painful emotions on their own for the rest of their lives.

As parents, we know all too well, the drive to protect our children from experiencing pain and difficult feelings. Perhaps if it is not talked about, they will not feel it and it will disappear. As a counselor I know this is not the case. The difficult, unprocessed thought, memory, or experience is buried underground and directs their behavior in some covert way from the depths in which it is hidden. A child might be fearful of going to certain places, be more hesitant making friends, be overly cautious to avoid injury, have a desire to be unrealistically perfect, regress to a younger age or will refuse to talk about similar things. Sometimes we are hesitant and fearful of bringing up difficult events because we are afraid we would not know the perfect words to help them through it and we might do more harm than good. Unfortunately there are no perfect words, though there are good ways to help children (and adults) process difficult emotions and events.

Talk It Out

Help your child talk by being a good listener. Listen more than talk, at least at first. Sometimes children will try to protect parents from feeling uncomfortable by not talking about difficult subjects. Other times kids will share a surface level

thought and will not share deeper, more crucial thoughts if their first thought is not received well. Resist the urge to offer quick reassurance or tell your child that they have no reason to feel that way. Instead, say, "that sounds scary, tell me more", or "what else are you thinking about?" Try and get your child to talk completely, before offering guidance or reassurances.

Name It to Tame It

If your child is triggered by an overwhelming emotion and cannot talk it out in the moment, your first step will be to ask your child what emotion they are feeling and what thought or event led them to feel this way. This might be hard for them at first if they are not used to talking about their feelings. You can help them by saying, "It looks like something is going on for you, I am wondering what you are feeling right now, and what might be making you feel this way".

Feel It to Heal It

Helping your child learn to better tolerate unpleasant emotions by directly experiencing them is a huge protective skill. Ask your child how big they feel the feeling is, where they are feeling it in their body, or if it were a color, what would it be? These questions help your child stay with the emotion instead of running away from it or burying it deep below. They will learn that even though the emotion is painful, they can handle it. This is an empowering, sustaining belief.

A lasting Gift

Using the above techniques as well as the coping skills listed below, you can help guide your child through difficult events and give them the gift to deal with future personal or communal tragedies. Adversity helps build skills for a successful life.

Next Months' Issue: Let's Talk About Kindness

Coping Skills

Breathing: Take a moment to take deep breaths,. A slow outbreath triggers relaxing brain chemicals

Thought stopping techniques: Recurring negative thoughts are not productive. Research thought stopping techniques to help.

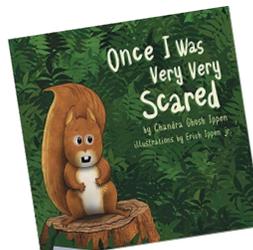
Exercise: Research shows a 15 minute cardio workout, is one of the best ways to reduce anxiety. So, get out there for a walk or have your own private dance party.

Nature: Taking some time to connect with the outdoors can help you to focus and clear your mind of thought clutter.

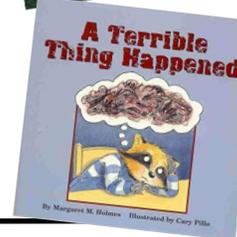
Change the script: Try to find the good in the bad. Point out all the helpers, or good things that come from a bad situation.

Book Recommendations

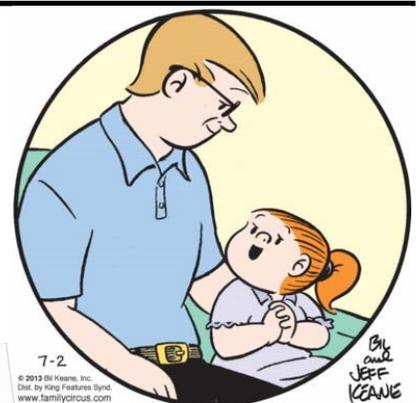
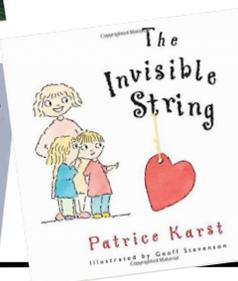
Once I was Very Very Scared by Chandra Ghosh Ippen



A Terrible Thing Happened by Margaret M. Holmes



The Invisible String by Patrice Karst



7-2
© 2013 by Keene, Inc.
Dist. by King Features Synd.
www.familycircus.com
"Sometimes when you hurt inside, the only medicine that'll help is a great big hug."

NEWSLETTER