

## Traumatic Events: Helping Our Children Cope During and After a Crisis

Children's reactions to trauma can be immediate but also may appear much later. Reactions differ in severity and could cover a range of behaviors including a fear of the event reoccurring as well as a loss of trust. People from different cultures may have their own ways of reacting. Some reactions vary according to age.

### **Possible effects of trauma on young children:**

Children are more vulnerable to the effects of trauma due to their lack of ability to understand the event. Children with existing behavioral problems may be more affected. Children who have experienced other traumatic events in their lives may be more affected.

Children under five can react in a number of ways:

- Facial expressions of fear
- Clinging to parent or caregiver
- Crying or screaming
- Whimpering or trembling
- Moving aimlessly
- Becoming immobile
- Returning to behaviors common to being younger:
  - Thumb sucking
  - Bedwetting
  - Being afraid of the dark.

A child's reaction to trauma may be dictated by their family and their environment. The way a family reacts to trauma may influence the way a child reacts. Following the event, a child may require reassurance that their environment is safe and secure. If after a month in a safe environment the child is not able to perform normal routines and/or new symptoms develop, seek the help of a trained professional.

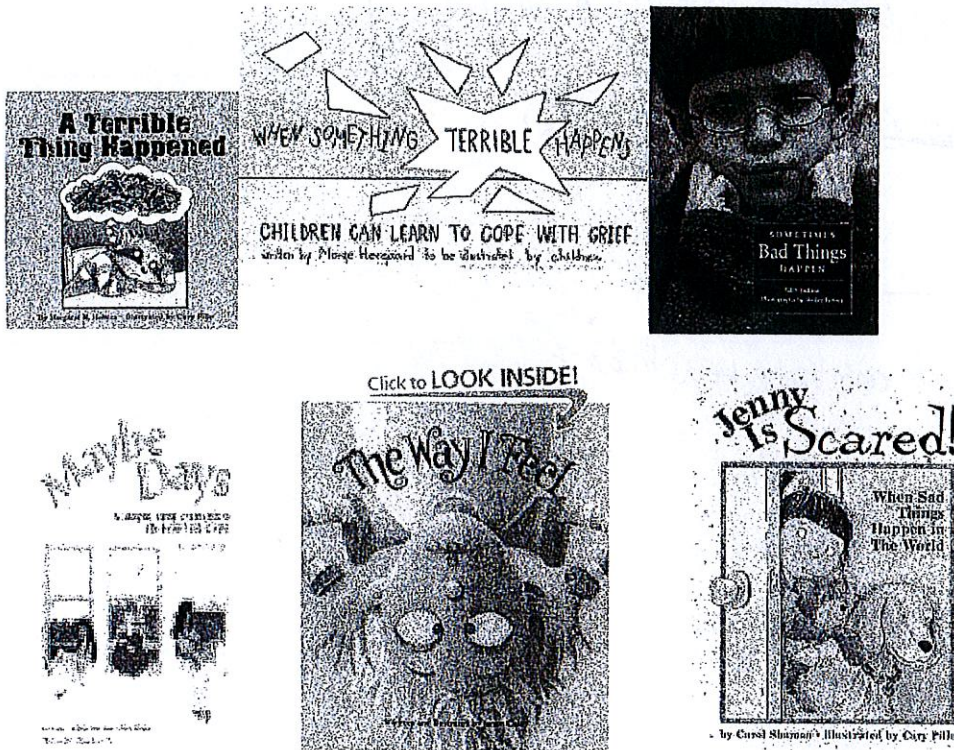
### **How can you help a young child heal?**

Reactions of adults to a traumatic event can be very important in the healing process of a child. There are several important steps in the healing process, and they can be remembered by thinking SAFETY.

- **Safety** - Focus on making sure a child feels safe.
  - Hold the child close and allow them to stay close to you in proximity.
  - Keep the child away from frightening images on the television and in video games.
  - Engage in familiar activities, such as singing a song they enjoy.
  - Follow a familiar routine throughout the day.
  - When an important adult leaves the room or center (e.g. a family member) be sure to tell the child where they are going and remind him/her when they will be back.

## Resources:

### Suggested Books for Young Children:



### Internet Resources:

[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org) (National Association for the Education of Young Children)

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

[www.childwitnessstoviolence.org](http://www.childwitnessstoviolence.org)

[www.cpeip.fsu.edu/resources.cfm](http://www.cpeip.fsu.edu/resources.cfm) (Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy)

- Fact Sheets can be downloaded on to your computer. Examples:
    - Healing After Trauma Skills
    - Helping Children Cope with Disasters
    - Helping Young Children and Families Cope with Trauma
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