Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program
Trainer’s Toolkit

Handout 3

Disaster Reactions and Interventions
## Disaster Reactions and Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Behavioral Reactions</th>
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<th>Intervention Options</th>
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| Preschool  | - Clinging to parents or familiar adults  
- Helplessness and passive behavior  
- Resumption of bed-wetting or thumb-sucking  
- Fears of the dark  
- Avoidance of sleeping alone  
- Increased crying | - Loss of appetite  
- Stomachaches  
- Nausea  
- Sleep problems or nightmares  
- Speech difficulties  
- Tics | - Anxiety  
- Generalized fear  
- Irritability  
- Angry outbursts  
- Sadness  
- Withdrawal | - Preoccupation with disaster  
- Poor concentration  
- Recurring dreams or nightmares | - Give verbal reassurance and physical comfort  
- Clarify misconceptions repeatedly  
- Provide comforting bedtime routines  
- Help with labels for emotions  
- Avoid unnecessary separations  
- Permit child to sleep in parents’ room temporarily  
- Demystify reminders  
- Encourage expression regarding losses (deaths, pets, toys)  
- Monitor media exposure  
- Encourage expression through play activities |
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| Childhood (6–11) | - Decline in school performance  
- School avoidance  
- Aggressive behavior at home or school  
- Hyperactive or silly behavior  
- Whining, clinging, or acting like a younger child  
- Increased competition with younger siblings for parents’ attention  
- Traumatic play and reenactments | - Change in appetite  
- Headaches  
- Stomachaches  
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares  
- Somatic complaints | - Fear of feelings  
- Withdrawal from friends or familiar activities  
- Reminders triggering fears  
- Angry outbursts  
- Preoccupation with crime, criminals, safety, and death  
- Self-blame  
- Guilt | - Preoccupation with disaster  
- Poor concentration  
- Recurring dreams or nightmares  
- Disorientation or confusion  
- Flashbacks  
- Questioning of spiritual beliefs | - Give additional attention and consideration  
- Relax expectations of performance at home and at school temporarily  
- Set gentle but firm limits for acting out  
- Provide structured but undemanding home chores and rehabilitation activities  
- Encourage verbal and play expression of thoughts and feelings  
- Listen to child’s repeated retelling of traumatic event  
- Clarify child’s distortions and misconceptions  
- Identify and assist with reminders  
- Develop school program for peer support, expressive activities, education on trauma and crime, preparedness planning, and identifying special children |
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<td>Pre-Adolescence and Adolescence (12–18)</td>
<td>- Decline in academic performance &lt;br&gt; - Rebellion at home or school &lt;br&gt; - Decline in responsible behavior &lt;br&gt; - Agitation or decrease in energy level, or apathy &lt;br&gt; - Delinquent behavior &lt;br&gt; - Risk-taking behavior &lt;br&gt; - Social withdrawal &lt;br&gt; - Abrupt shift in relationships</td>
<td>- Appetite changes &lt;br&gt; - Headaches &lt;br&gt; - Gastrointestinal problems &lt;br&gt; - Skin eruptions &lt;br&gt; - Complaints of vague aches and pains &lt;br&gt; - Sleep disorders</td>
<td>- Loss of interest in peer social activities, hobbies, or recreation &lt;br&gt; - Sadness or depression &lt;br&gt; - Anxiety and fearfulness about safety &lt;br&gt; - Resistance to authority &lt;br&gt; - Feelings of inadequacy and helplessness &lt;br&gt; - Guilt, self-blame, shame, and self-consciousness &lt;br&gt; - Desire for revenge</td>
<td>- Preoccupation with disaster &lt;br&gt; - Poor concentration &lt;br&gt; - Recurring dreams, nightmares, or flashbacks &lt;br&gt; - Disorientation or confusion &lt;br&gt; - Questioning of spiritual beliefs &lt;br&gt; - Difficulty setting priorities &lt;br&gt; - Difficulty making decisions &lt;br&gt; - Loss of objectivity</td>
<td>- Give additional attention and consideration &lt;br&gt; - Relax expectations of performance at home and school temporarily &lt;br&gt; - Encourage discussion of experience of trauma with peers and significant adults &lt;br&gt; - Avoid insistence on discussion of feelings with parents &lt;br&gt; - Address impulse to recklessness &lt;br&gt; - Link behavior and feelings to event &lt;br&gt; - Encourage physical activities &lt;br&gt; - Encourage resumption of social activities, athletics, clubs, etc. &lt;br&gt; - Encourage participation in community activities and school events &lt;br&gt; - Develop school programs for peer support and debriefing, special student support groups, telephone hotlines, drop-in centers, and identification of special teens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>- Sleep problems</td>
<td>- Nausea</td>
<td>- Shock, disorientation, and numbness</td>
<td>- Preoccupation with disaster</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Avoidance of reminders</td>
<td>- Headaches</td>
<td>- Poor concentration</td>
<td>- Protect, direct, and connect</td>
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<td>- Excessive activity level</td>
<td>- Fatigue or exhaustion</td>
<td>- Recurring dreams, nightmares, or flashbacks</td>
<td>- Ensure access to emergency medical services</td>
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<td>- Protectiveness toward loved ones</td>
<td>- Gastrointestinal distress</td>
<td>- Grief</td>
<td>- Provide supportive listening and opportunity to talk about experience and losses</td>
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<td>- Crying easily</td>
<td>- Appetite change</td>
<td>- Irritability or anger</td>
<td>- Provide frequent rescue and recovery updates and resources for questions</td>
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<td>- Angry outbursts</td>
<td>- Somatic complaints</td>
<td>- Anxiety or fear</td>
<td>- Assist with prioritizing and problem solving</td>
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<td>- Increased conflicts with family</td>
<td>- Worsening of chronic conditions</td>
<td>- Despair or hopelessness</td>
<td>- Help family to facilitate communication and effective functioning</td>
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<td>- Hypervigilance</td>
<td>- Depression or sadness</td>
<td>- Guilt or self-doubt</td>
<td>- Provide information on traumatic stress and coping, children’s reactions, and tips for families</td>
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<td>- Isolation, withdrawal, or shutting down</td>
<td>- Grief</td>
<td>- Mood swings</td>
<td>- Provide information on criminal justice procedures and roles of primary responder groups</td>
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<td>- Protect crime victim services</td>
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<td>- Assess and refer, when indicated</td>
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<td>- Provide information on referral resources</td>
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<td>- Provide information on substance abuse self-help (for self, family, friends)</td>
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| Older Adults | - Withdrawal and isolation  
- Reluctance to leave home  
- Mobility limitations  
- Relocation adjustment problems | - Worsening of chronic illnesses  
- Sleep disorders  
- Memory problems  
- Somatic symptoms  
- More susceptibility to hypothermia and hyperthermia  
- Physical and sensory limitations (sight, hearing) that interfere with recovery | - Depression  
- Despair about losses  
- Apathy  
- Suspicion  
- Agitation or anger  
- Fears of institutionalization  
- Anxiety about unfamiliar surroundings  
- Embarrassment about receiving “handouts” | - Preoccupation with disaster  
- Poor concentration  
- Recurring dreams, nightmares, or flashbacks  
- Disorientation or confusion  
- Questioning of spiritual beliefs  
- Difficulty setting priorities  
- Difficulty making decisions  
- Loss of objectivity | - Provide strong and persistent verbal reassurance  
- Provide orienting information  
- Ensure physical needs are addressed (water, food, warmth)  
- Use multiple assessment methods, as problems may be underreported  
- Assist with reconnecting with family and support systems  
- Assist in obtaining medical and financial assistance  
- Encourage discussion of traumatic recovery experience and losses, and expression of emotions  
- Provide crime victim assistance  
- Same as adults for substance abuse services |