

HELPING CHILDREN COPE

Children feel overwhelmed with the intensity of their emotions. Younger children may not know how to identify, much less verbalize their feelings. Play, and fantasies expressed in play, can often give clues about concerns the child may have. Let the children make their own interpretations and express their feelings. You can do this by getting down to the child's level to play, draw, or read with them.

Teens may feel unable to discuss their feelings with family members. More often the peer group, or at times school personnel, may be a safer place for the teen to mourn. Most of the common reactions listed for teens are transitory and resolve within a short time. Teens who withdraw from their peers as well from family members may need close attention. They may be experiencing fears they are

that **for** they are feeling is normal and give an avenue to express their feelings.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- * Recognize your own feelings and talk to others about them.
- * Provide information - accurately, completely, but simply.
- * Create opportunities for children to talk with you and with each other. Listen carefully and patiently even if the same questions are asked repeatedly. Model your true feelings and inquire about theirs.
- * Predict and discuss the range of feelings that may be experienced - this legitimizes, normalizes, and prepares them for theirs.
- * Listen to what they say.
- * Look for the questions behind the questions.
- * Encourage stories and drawings, and then ask them to explain and/or interpret their works.
- * Reassure the children of their safety - remember they feel vulnerable.
- * Relax the rules to allow opportunities for expression of feelings but continue to maintain a sense of structure and routine.
- * Talk with other adults who are close to the affected children to assure consistency of information given, reactions seen, interventions planned.
- * Offer praise for positive behaviors, even if you must look for them between times of misbehavior.
- * If you are the parent, spend extra time with your children, especially at bedtime. Hug and touch your children more - it's a physical way of providing the reassurance that you are there for them.
- * Use words or phrases that are accurate. Using sleep for death, for example, or saying that God chooses the best can instill fear.

