



# The Vine

## *Guidance for Life's Journey*



Traumatic events affect us all differently and children are no different. One thing we must understand though is that children especially deal with traumatic events very differently from adults. So how do we as parents, grandparents, and caretakers help our children cope with these traumatic events? One thing that will help us is to look for behaviors that we might see that are natural. Though these are natural, we must be aware of these behaviors in the case that they might become overt or out of control.

- Increased clinginess, crying and whining
- Greater fear of separation from parents
- Increase in aggressive behavior
- More withdrawn and harder to engage
- Play that acts out scary events
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- More easily frustrated and harder to comfort
- A return to earlier behaviors, like frequent nighttime awakenings and thumb sucking

How do we help them cope? The traumatic events may have happened in our world and is overplayed on our televisions such as September 11th, the shootings at Virginia Tech or the war in Iraq. The events could be something that happened within the family or with friends, regardless there are things we can do to help them cope.

- Don't leave the TV and radio news reports on all the time
- Maintain a regular routine
- Respond to your child's need for increased attention, comfort and assurance.
- Pay close to child's feelings and validate them. Ignoring feelings does not make them go away.

- Help your child identify their feelings by naming them, i.e. "scared", "angry", "sad"
- Inform family and friends that you have chosen not to expose them to this trauma (Babies and toddlers especially)
- Offer your child safe ways to express feelings, such as drawing, pretend play, or telling stories.
- Be patient and calm when your child is clingy, whiny or aggressive. They need you to help them regain control and feel safe.
- Answer children's questions according to their level of understanding: "Yes, a bad thing happened but we are keeping you safe."

One last thing, do not be afraid to show your feelings and emotions. Be aware that children take cues from parents as to what is an appropriate way to handle stress, trauma and life events. If we show unhealthy ways of handling stressors and coping with life events, we could negatively affect our children as to how they handle these same stressors. It could not only affect them now but on into the future as adults.

When our children were born, they did not come with an owner's manual so many times we parents are "shooting from the hip" and calling things as we see them. Much of how we parent our children are either in relation to how our parents' raised us or in reaction to our parents. So my encouragement to all parents, grandparents and caretakers is that we love our children as much as possible, help them grow and mature in the best way possible, and allow them to be the person that God desires for them.

*Michael Sepulveda*