

After Traumatic Events...Listen

by [Melanie C. Gordon](#)

The Psalmist says,

*“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by.”*

Lord, Hear Our Prayer!

Once again we stand in a place where we need to reassure children that they are safe even when we may not feel safe ourselves. Shock, fear, anxiety, anger, and confusion are normal, so the adults in the lives of our children need to be equipped to respond and act. Through our baptism, we promise to surround our children “with a community of love and forgiveness.” We are that community. So, together we...

Pray with children for the victims of the shooting. Simple prayers like: Dear God, help and bless the people who were harmed. Guard them all with your care. Amen.

Discuss openly with children what your family and congregation are doing to help those who have been hurt and are still hurting.

Limit exposure to continuing news stories and hold adult conversations only when children are not present. This will limit trauma by protecting children from ongoing media images of this travesty that may only contribute to fear and helplessness.

Reassure children as you listen to their fears. Children experience the same feelings as adults, so it is important and reasonable to validate their feelings while keeping a positive outlook on the future.

Share your own feelings with your children. Fear is a part of the human condition, and it is appropriate to affirm feelings of fear. There are also books that are appropriate for helping children cope with what they are feeling. A list is below.

Contact organizations in your area that address the needs of children. Following traumatic events, these organizations are ready to answer your questions and respond to your concerns.

Provide structure through routine and activity. Routines and activities help regain a sense of control and security when so much feels out of control.

Make objects that encourage play reenactment of the images children observe during and after a traumatic experience. Children learn through play, and often use actions rather than words to express their fears or anxieties.

Encourage children to draw or write whatever comes to their minds, or give them a question or topic to draw about. Create a group mural or collage that illustrates the images children have seen. Follow up by listening to what they may have to say about how they are feeling.

Do good. Doing good for others helps children overcome the sense of powerlessness. There are many ways to be helpful in your community and around the world: <http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies> (<http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies>)

Ongoing communication is helpful for validating children's feelings about the images they see or the conversations they hear about traumatic events. Most importantly, end each conversation on a positive note by assuring children of God's love. Scripture, like "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" or "God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him," different translations from Psalm 46 is one example of scripture that can bring children comfort.

Comprehensive Resource Lists

[A Resource List for Helping Children Cope with Disasters](#) — Discipleship Ministries

[Collaborative List from Children's Ministers](#) — Ministry with Children FaceBook Group

Resources for Ministers, Teachers, and Parents

[In Times of Pain and Crisis](#) — Discipleship Ministries

[Fred Rogers on Scary News](#) — PBS

[Helping Children Cope with Frightening News](#) — Child Mind Institute

[Helping Children Cope with Trauma and Stress](#) by Jamie Howard, PhD

[Reconciliation Webinar](#) — Discipleship Ministries

[Helping Children Make Sense of the World Webinar](#) — Discipleship Ministries

[DOWNLOAD Helping Children Cope with Trauma slides](#) [.ppsx]

Books for Children

Water Bugs & Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children by Doris Stickney

The Memory Box by Mary Bahr

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia

Feelings by Aliki — Helps children to identify and explain their feelings.

To Everything by Bob Barner — Changes that bring both joy and sorrow are part of life. Includes discussion questions and activities guide.

Bedtime for Frances by Russell Hoban. Illustrated by Garth Williams. — Reflects specific fears of children at bedtime.

Mama Do You Love Me? by Barbara M. Joosse. Illustrated by Barbara Lavalle. — An Inuit mother reassures her child that love does not diminish in difficult times.

Abiyoyo by Pete Seeger. Illustrated by Michael Hays. — Fighting a monster through music encourages children to explore feelings through pretend play.

The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything by Linda Williams. — An interactive and rhythmic tale about feeling scared. Excellent for group time and as a flannel-board story.

peace,
melanie

http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/after-traumatic-events-listen?utm_source=DiscipleshipMinistries&utm_medium=DMfacebook&utm_content=crisis-orlando&utm_campaign=children  Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church*