

<p style="text-align: center;">TIDEWATER PASTORAL COUNSELING SERVICES DEALING WITH TRAUMA HELPING KIDS AND FAMILIES COPE</p>

In light of the recent events at Virginia Tech the following information is shared in helping kids and families cope with the tragedy.

Responses to Trauma:

After a trauma, people go through a wide range of normal responses. Such reactions are experienced not only by people who were involved in the trauma first-hand, but sometimes by those who have either witnessed or heard about or have had different kinds of involvement with the persons immediately affected. Many reactions tend to be triggered by persons, places, or things associated with the trauma. Some reactions may appear totally unrelated. These are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events. Here is a list of common physical and emotional reactions to trauma:

Physical Reactions:

- Aches and pains like headaches, backaches, stomach aches
- Sudden sweating and/or heart palpitations
- Changes in sleep patterns, appetite
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Easily startled by noises or unexpected touch
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs or food

Emotional Reactions:

- Shock and disbelief
- Fear and or anxiety
- Grief, disorientation, denial
- Hyper alertness or hypervigilance
- Irritability, restlessness, outbursts or rage or anger
- Emotional mood swings
- Worrying or ruminating
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks – feeling like the trauma is happening now
- Tendency to isolate
- Feelings of detachment
- Feelings of self-blame or survival guilt
- Diminished interest in everyday activities
- Expectation of doom and fear of the future
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering

The reaction to trauma can often last longer than a person expects – it may take weeks, months and in some cases years to regain the previous level of functioning.

Trauma Recovery Tips:

Children are especially vulnerable to the trauma and unforgettable images from tragedy. Parents and other adults should respond with sensitivity and appropriately to help children feel physically and emotionally safe. Children under the age of five won't fully understand what has happened, but will pick up on the reactions of those around them and act accordingly. Adolescents will respond much the same as adults. The following tips will help provide a supportive and stable environment:

- **Be Calm.** Children mirror the reactions of their parents and other adults. It is fine to share your feelings of sorrow, however, express your more intense reactions only with other adults outside the presence of children.
- **Tell the truth but don't give more information than is requested.** Allow children to ask questions, listen carefully and thoroughly, and then answer them. Don't be surprised if a child asks a question and then asks it again later. Kids tend to deal with trauma in small segments – never force a child to talk about it if he or she doesn't want to.
- **Limit television/radio/internet exposure.** Children should never be exposed to any terrifying imagery by themselves and this exposure should be greatly limited or preferably eliminated completely.
- **Recognize that some younger children will reenact what they hear.** If you see a child reenacting what they have heard about try to get them to talk with you about it. This helps them to work through and resolve the trauma for themselves.
- **Some children may regress for a while.** Children may temporarily have problems with sleeping; toilet training; doing daily living activities that they previously had mastered. Children need your support and encouragement during this time – do not punish them for these setbacks.
- **Keep a normal routine.** Do not change your typical routine if at all possible. Children often find comfort in the routine of doing things the same way.
- **Reassure children that they are safe and their feelings are normal.** Reassure children that they are safe and loved and that people are doing everything possible to make this a safer world. Don't try to change their feelings or say how they should feel. Let them know that you will not judge, tease or make fun of them about what they tell you.

Be on the lookout for any problems that may be more serious. If you have any questions or would like to talk to staff of **Tidewater Pastoral Counseling** call **623-2700**.