**Helping Elementary Students Deal With Tragic Events In Their Community**

**Reinforce ideas of safety and security.**  This may be needed multiple times, particularly in response to changes in information received, loud sounds, or other events that may remind certain students of this tragedy or of other similar tragedies that they have previously experienced in their own lives.  *Remember to STICK TO THE SIMPLE FACTS and dispel any rumors when providing information to help children fully process the event. Emphasize that even though the scary event occurred, there are safe adults here at school and in our community, and there are procedures and rules put in place, to ensure everyone’s safety.*

**Encourage students to talk with parents/guardians or another safe adult** about confusing feelings, worries, daydreams, and disruptions of concentration they may be experiencing. Listen carefully when children express their thoughts/ feelings to you and validate them by reminding students that these are normal reactions to a scary event. Provide reassurance to the students that feelings will get smaller and easier to handle over time.

**Try to respond to children’s questions about the event in a calm manner, answering questions in simple, direct terms and helping the students transition back to their activity.**  You do not have to go into details to get the facts across. Try to remember that young children will process the information about the events at unpredictable times and sometimes in possibly uncomfortable or even inappropriate ways.

**Gently help students develop a realistic understanding of the event.** Students may misunderstand information about the event as they are trying to make sense of what happened.  They may believe or talk about things that did not actually happen**.** *Redirect students’ fears by going over the facts, and focusing on safety rules and procedures in place.*

**Do classroom activities that will reinforce the message that one person can make a difference to help and heal.**  We may not be able to directly help those that were directly affected by the tragic event, however, we can do activities that can help all of us to heal.*Find some time to read a book about helping others or do a kindness related activity. You do not have to relate the activity directly to the tragic event to get a positive impact.*

**Protect students from re-exposure to frightening situations and reminders of trauma.** Conduct a brief classroom discussion of the facts relating to the event ONLY IF the majority of students are affected. Seek out support from school resource staff to help facilitate a conversation with the class if necessary. Otherwise, take time to speak to students individually when concerns arise.Encourage students to limit their exposure to news sources over the next few weeks. Remind them that they have the right to not watch the television, not read the news, or not listen when other people talk about the “scary” parts of the event around them.

**Maintain communication with other teachers, school personnel, and parents to monitor how the students are coping** and get help from school resource staff if necessary.

**Remain aware of your own reactions to the traumatic event.  It is okay to express emotions to your students, such as “I am feeling sad about what happened.”**  However, if you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, it is important to take care of yourself and seek out support from other staff members and/or outside community resources, like employee assistance agencies.

**Source:** *Guidelines for Teachers Following Trauma/Disaster: What Can I Do to Help?* from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (2001)