



Building a Healthy Boston

## Dealing with Children's Fears During and After a Crisis

The bombing that occurred in Boston may cause strong feelings in children: fear, anger, anxiety and sadness are all likely reactions. Children need to know that they can talk about these feelings and that the adults who care for them will provide comfort and keep them safe. If you are the parent or caregiver, some guidelines to follow are:

- Listen to what your child says about feelings. Watch for signs of feelings they don't express. Your child may become more withdrawn or more agitated. Sleep disturbance is a common reaction. Your child may also become fearful of new situations or things they hadn't feared in the past. Don't tell them the feelings are wrong. Do tell them that even though a bad thing happened, you are there to keep them safe. Let them know that things will be okay.
- Even if your older child (6-18) doesn't bring up the events in Boston, ask if they've heard about what happened and what they are feeling. Given access to media, all but the youngest children are likely to know something about the bombing. Not talking may imply that you are too scared to talk, making what happened seem even more frightening.
- Reassure your child about the safety of families and friends (if, in fact, all are safe). You may want to name the people a child could worry about, so they know that even if they don't see grandma or a cousin or a neighbor at the moment, those people have not been harmed.
- Gently correct incorrect information they may have picked up. No need for long talks about what happened or why, but don't let the child hold on to wrong information that may make things seem worse than they really are. A child may not be able to tell fact from opinion. When there are unanswered questions, it is fine to say there are some things no one knows yet.
- **TURN OFF THE TV AND RADIO.** In the course of a day, TV stations show the same footage dozens of times. A child may experience each replay as a fresh source of terror. Even if the child seems busy, the background repetition has an effect. When your child does watch or listen to a media report, turn it off at the end and ask what they saw or heard. Make it a chance to talk.
- Offer your child opportunities to help others. One effect of disaster is a feeling of helplessness. Children (and adults) can regain a sense of effectiveness by donating, joining a community event to remember or support those who were directly harmed or helping in some other way.

And finally, be aware of your own feelings. Children pick up on parents' feelings and behaviors, so maintain everyday routines and find time to talk to other adults about your own concerns.