

The sections below are for you to read with your child or for your child to read by themselves.

Some Do's for the child

- ❖ **Do** talk about what has happened to you, if you can, particularly to those adults who are looking after you and who love you. Don't feel that you have to do so, you may find that you can only say a bit at a time and that you do not wish to talk further. If you don't want to talk say so.
- ❖ **Do** accept sadness and crying as normal, particularly in the early stages of shock, although you may not like it.
- ❖ **Do** try to control your fear of panic by whatever means you know. Relaxation, distraction, talking to people or thinking about other things can all help.

Some Don'ts for the child

- ❖ **Don't** avoid showing your feelings. You may be experiencing a mixture of powerful emotions; grief, anger, sadness, guilt, fear, relief, hope.
- ❖ **Don't** be surprised if your emotions go up and down.
- ❖ **Don't** expect bad memories to vanish. They are normal. The task is to manage your thoughts by putting them out of your mind, by distracting yourself. Tell yourself that what is happening to you is normal and is only to be expected. In this way memories become less of a problem.

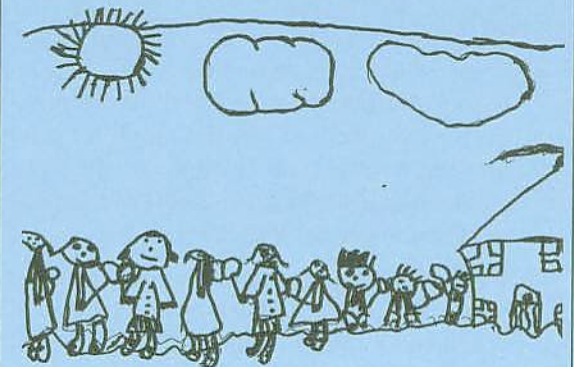
It may take some time for you and your family to learn to cope with what has happened. You may not forget what has happened, but you will probably be able to manage your feelings in time.

There are other leaflets available which cover a range of difficulties that your child may experience at home and school. For a list of leaflets ask your school or contact the EPS on (01302) 737291.

COPING WITH DISASTER

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Bringing up children is a difficult job and no-one teaches us how to do it. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we hope these leaflets will help you to understand why some of these problems occur and how to deal with them.



DONCASTER EDUCATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

COPING WITH DISASTER

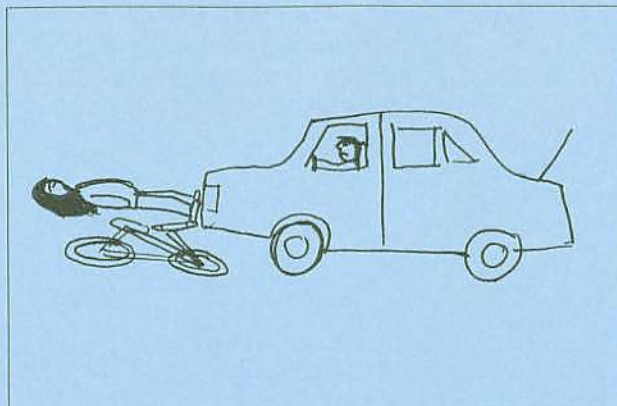
We are all aware that major accidents and disasters sometimes occur. Whilst these are rare, the resultant emotional and psychological damage to victims, witnesses, rescuers and their families can be far-reaching and distressing.

Whilst we are just beginning to acknowledge the consequences of such major and unusually traumatic events, historical data from time of war show that such reactions can be seen as normal in the face of abnormal conditions. A child might need help to cope with these reactions if they have:

- ❖ been a victim in a disaster or accident;
- ❖ witnessed such an event;
- ❖ learned that a close friend or relative has been a victim.

What are the possible effects of such an experience?

- ❖ They may have repetitive and intrusive thoughts about the accident or trauma. These can occur at any time and the child may experience vivid flashbacks, which are like mental pictures of what has happened, or re-experiencing the event.
- ❖ Sleep disturbances are common, including fear of the dark, bad dreams and waking at odd times throughout the night.
- ❖ A child may not want to separate from parents or carers and may not want to sleep alone or be alone.
- ❖ There may be fears associated with specific aspects of the traumatic experience and certain things may be avoided because of their association with the event.



- ❖ A child might become insensitive to dangers within their environment.
- ❖ They might become depressed and even have suicidal thoughts.
- ❖ A child may be extremely irritable and angry for some time afterwards.
- ❖ There may be difficulty in talking, both to family and friends.
- ❖ There may be memory and concentration difficulties.
- ❖ A child may suddenly experience panic attacks including breathing difficulties and palpitations (a feeling of fast loud heartbeats).

How can I help my child?

The reactions experienced by the child or young person will be distressing to all concerned. It is important to realise that these reactions are normal when someone has been exposed to a particularly abnormal event. In these circumstances, stay calm and offer reassurance that what is happening to them is to be expected. They may well feel that they are going mad - they are not.

You can help your child by

- ❖ providing continued reassurance of love and support. When words fail, hug and hold your child close.
- ❖ seeking help from other supportive people.
- ❖ notifying the child's school or nursery about the child's trauma.
- ❖ speaking at a level in keeping with the child's understanding.
- ❖ allowing your child to go through his or her own individual stages of grief.
- ❖ not discouraging the subject of the disaster in the home.
- ❖ considering trauma counselling and support groups if available.

