

Mental health tips for parents

{Not listed in order of importance}

1. Celebrate birthdays and other important events as much as possible. Even a slice of cake for the birthday boy or girl or a small present will suffice. It's more about not letting a birthday go by without it being celebrated than about the way it is done.
2. Keep routine of bedtimes, eating meals together at the usual times, etc. as much as possible under the given circumstances.
3. Allow for playtime and storytelling -even if it means you are listening to the same story over and over again- as these are two main ways children process their experiences.
4. Let your child's behavior and not his/ her verbalization give you feedback on their wellbeing. They can't understand, let alone verbalize certain emotions and states they feel, but they often 'act them out'.
5. While there is no need to further traumatize them with detailed news updates and graphic images, always answer their questions honestly, to the point, and age appropriately. It's important that your children know they can come to you with questions and that they will get an honest answer from you.
6. Another great way to lessen their anxiety is to include them in age appropriate clean up and recovery efforts.
7. Without overwhelming details, feel free to share your emotions with them, not only to role model how to talk about these issues, but also to validate that both children AND adults can -and will at some point in life- experience unpleasant emotions. This is not to say you should let yourself loose and cry inconsolably in front of them, but say something like: "On the night of the storm I was scared.", or "I glad the storm is over, but I feel overwhelmed by the things I see around us." If possible, end on an encouraging note, such as "I have a plan."
8. Refrain from sharing detailed information on financial hardship or other issues that are typically adult concerns and are outside a child's control. Knowing about it, yet not having the capacity to do anything about it can be extremely anxiety provoking.
9. Remember that when children do not know how to deal with something, they look to us for guidance.

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