

Questions & Sample Answers

ECHO-TV Show #19 “How To Talk To Children About Crisis?”

(Taping Date: Tuesday, May 23rd, 2006 / 3:00-8:00 pm-TPT)

Before addressing questions/answers ECHO hosts/guests might wish to acknowledge some culturally specific awareness notes including:

- Many cultures have survived crisis including wars but their children have not and by sharing experiences and learning how to prepare for disasters, families can improve how well they respond health and safety emergencies.
- Disasters may result in many casualties or death – this show focuses on mental health needs during recovery rather than solely dealing with grief or death. We hope to address that in future shows.

1. What do we mean by a crisis or disaster?

Answer: **Ann Add: “You’d go to a doctor with cuts and bruises so why not emotional help?” (See email last page)**

- This program focuses on natural disasters or planned attacks affecting many people at once from emergencies like tsunamis, tornados, bombings, or disease outbreaks.
- Unexpected losses from disasters take us away from normal routines at home, work or school and that can affect how we feel or act.
- Struggling with our thoughts and feelings after a disaster is a normal part of recovering from a disaster – and seeking help is a healthy response. We see doctors for cuts and bruises and seeking emotional help can heal feelings.

2. Why do we need to talk to children differently than adults?

Answer:

- During a disaster, children need help understanding in language they know best for their age, what is happening at home and in the family.
- When bad things happen, adults often want to protect children from the truth but it's better to share what you know rather than pretend everything is okay – when it isn't.
- In some cultures there is a belief that if you talk about disaster you will invite it to come to you however, in America – talking about disasters and preparing for them can help families know what to do if there is a tornado or disease outbreak.

3. What are some appropriate ways to tell my children bad or scary news?

Answer:

- Be honest and talk with children about what is happening.
- Tell your children in ways they can understand for their age group.
- Make sure you let children ask questions – this will help you understand their worries and concerns.
- Spend extra time with your children and ask them how they are feeling. Some children think they may have “caused the problem but by spending extra time with them they feel listened to, cared for and loved.

4. What if my children don't ask any questions – should I still talk with them about what is happening? Rose wants to add media bullet #3 below

Answer:

- Yes – Sometimes children are not aware of what's happening around them or they are afraid to ask.
- When you talk about the emergency, be sure to tell your children about how you are planning for their safety.
- Don't assume your children don't know that something is happening - if you have TV, radio or the Internet, they are learning about the disaster there.

5. What about babies or very young children who don't talk yet? How should I deal with their fears?

Answer:

- Just because babies can't talk about their feelings doesn't mean they don't experience the disaster. Comfort them when they are upset by holding, rocking and singing to them as you normally would a baby or small child.
- Keep them on a regular sleeping and eating schedule as much as possible.
- If the baby or child has a favorite blanket or toy, be sure you have it with you at all times.

6. Is it better to send my children away to a safe place instead of keeping them in a “disaster area”?

Answer:

- **Physically** a child might be safer if sent away from the disaster but **emotionally** they may need to stay close to the family as they recover together. A lot depends on the age and the personality of your child.
- When children have difficulties and sending them to safety is the only choice, be sure they have things to comfort them, find ways to keep in contact with them, help them know how long they will be away and try to have siblings stay together.

7. How can I respond to my children if we are dealing with a disaster?

Answer:

- A disaster disrupts normal routines like regular meals, bedtime, school or play time causing children to misbehave. Find ways to notice a child’s good behavior during tough times.
- Everyone reacts differently to loss or disasters. Children might act out these feelings with anger, sadness, fear, or say nothing at all. They may eat less and sleep more – and it’s important to pay attention to these behaviors.

8. How might a disaster affect my children in the short term AND the long term?

Answer:

- It's hard to predict how much impact a disaster might have on anyone because everyone reacts differently. Survivors once living in war-torn countries may choose never to forget supporting historical and cultural reasons.
- What's important is to know it's okay for children and adults to ask for help when struggling with feelings and stress caused by an emergency or disaster.
- In the short term, children might struggle to understand what has happened but with help, families can return to normal activities as they recover over time from a disaster.

9. Where can children and families go to talk about their feelings and mental health (emotional) support? **Ann: Kids can take on extra responsibility during recovery... temporarily (see email last page)**

Answer:

- There is no shame in seeking help if children or adults are struggling with the emotional impact of a disaster. **Rose: Parents need to take care of themselves so they can take care of their children.**
- Trained counselors and places where people pray or worship are often helpful resources as are health care clinics and schools.
- Preparing for emergencies helps families know where to go and what to do when they need help so talk about how to be healthy and safe before there is an emergency.

Overall, I think the questions and answers are really well written. I have just a few comments. One thing that isn't addressed at all is that children often try to protect their parents as much as parents try to protect children. Children may take on more responsibility; they may provide emotional support for their parents and they may not want to talk to their parents because they want to protect them. That's also normal; it's important to make sure that children get their needs met and to recognize that you

may have to transition back into more normal parent-child roles after you establish routines again. Now having, said all of that, I don't know if it's realistic to try to communicate that in this limited amount of time. I wanted to offer it up as food for thought though.

I'm not sure what is meant where it says "Survivors once living in war-torn countries may choose never to forget supporting historical and cultural reasons." I think some survivors might prefer to forget and may not be able to. My assumption is that you are saying that survivors may choose to remember and recognize their past experiences because it is

part of who they are--their history and tradition. Is that right? Finally, I wonder if we could say a little more under What you can do. For the first bullet, I would add something like, Some people may have bruises; some may have cuts, and some may have injuries that need medical help; the same is true for our feelings. You can tweak the language, but I'd like to emphasize that it is similar to getting medical help. Let me know if you have any questions about my comments. Thanks again. It looks great. Let me know when might work for a conference call. Wednesday morning is probably my best time this week. Thanks, Ann

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>>> "McDonald, Lillian" <Lillian.McDonald@CO.RAMSEY.MN.US> 5/12/2006
12:46 PM >>>

Hello Ladies --

Rose and I enjoyed a very interesting discussion on the original set of Questions and Answers for ECHO hosts & guests. Nearly everyone contributed some ethnic insights into the drafted information provided. I have made many revisions and offer this for everyone's review (Rose: since you attended, I'm especially appreciative of your scrutiny of my work below to be sure I captured context).

Please review ASAP -- I promised hosts and guests we would provide this information early next week. We tape this program on May 23rd.... so I want to be sure to give them a full week and next weekend to read and review. Please reply by end of Monday - May 15th! Thank you all.
Lillian

-----Original Message-----

From: Rose Allen [mailto:allen027@umn.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, May 16, 2006 11:26 AM
To: McDonald, Lillian
Subject: RE: ECHO TV Show Taping 5-23-06 / English

Hi Lillian:

ECHO #19 (How to Talk to Kids About Crisis)
Q & A: May 2006 by ECHO (Emergency and Community Health Outreach) Minnesota
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I just had a chance to look over the Q and A - I only would suggest 2 things:

#4 - I would add a bullet about the media - Don't assume your children don't know that something is happening - if you have Television, a radio or the Internet, they are learning about the disaster there.

#9 - We need to advise parents to take care of them selves so they can take care of their children.

That's all I have to suggest

Rose

Rose Allen