

NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER

CHANGING THE FACE OF CHILD MENTAL HEALTH

MARCH 2007

This monthly newsletter provides parenting and mental health information, as well as upcoming events and programs by the NYU Child Study Center.

ASK THE EXPERT: HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH TRAUMA AND BEREAVEMENT

Michelle Pearlman, Ph.D., is the Director of the Trauma and Bereavement Service at the NYU Child Study Center

Q: What is considered a traumatic event for a child?

A: Traumatic events are situations in which someone is exposed to an actual or threatened serious injury or death, or a violation of physical integrity, leading to intense fear and helplessness. These situations may be short-lived, such as experiencing a serious car accident or witnessing a violent crime. Other times, these situations are more chronic, such as when a child endures ongoing bullying or physical/sexual abuse.

Q: What about when a child experiences the death of a loved one?

A: A variety of factors influence how children respond following the death of a loved one, including age and the child's understanding of death in general. Young children may have difficulty understanding the loss and their subsequent feelings, while older children may worry about how the loss will impact their future. Children experience loss in different ways, and there is not one right way to grieve or even a set of stages that each child must go through.

Q: What is the best way to help children after trauma or death?

A: Children tend to be very resilient, meaning that they are able to overcome life's challenges and emerge from difficult experiences with positive outcomes. Adults can help children by encouraging open and honest conversations about their feelings and concerns. Although parents often worry that talking to children about such topics will increase their fears and cause further damage, this is not the case. In fact, allowing children to talk about their worries and ask questions in a supportive environment usually helps them to feel safe and less afraid. A good rule of thumb is to follow the child's lead in talking about what happened—continue to talk as long as the child is interested, and allow the conversation to end (for the time being, at least) when the child seems satisfied that his or her questions have been answered.

Q: What are some signs that a child might need help following a trauma or death?

A: Following these types of experiences, some children may experience emotional difficulties (for example, confusion, worry, sadness, and anger) or behavioral problems (for example, acting out at home or having trouble at school). Some of these reactions may be short-lived and resolve on their own, while others may linger for months or even years. Sometimes these issues do not appear until months after the event has occurred. If a child's general behavior, mood, or academic functioning has suffered following a traumatic event, the child may benefit from professional help.

There are also specific warning signs that may indicate when a child is having trouble coping with a traumatic event or death of a loved one. For example, some children avoid thinking about or talking about what happened, and they may even stop doing certain activities that they used to do. Children may also express worry about the health and safety of themselves and their family members. Other warning signs include irritability, withdrawal from friends, nightmares, and excessive feelings of guilt, sadness, or nervousness.

We know that these and other related problems can be resolved with short-term therapy, which helps children resume healthy development and living.

Q: What kinds of services does the Child Study Center offer for children who have experienced trauma or loss?

A: The Trauma and Bereavement Service is dedicated to helping people adjust following stressful life events, such as trauma and the loss of a loved one. Our services are designed for children and their families, adolescents, and adults with a history of trauma or bereavement.

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csc-communications@med.nyu.edu

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The first step is usually an evaluation, which involves a review of the child's history and current functioning in order to determine the best course of treatment and to provide appropriate recommendations. Based on the evaluation, it is sometimes determined that therapy would be beneficial. Therapy is usually focused on helping the individual or family to cope with the trauma or loss and to function well in daily life. The therapist also helps parents talk with their children about what happened and about how to prepare for the future.

For more information about the Trauma and Bereavement Service at the NYU Child Study Center, please call (212) 263-6622 or visit our website, www.AboutOurKids.org.

Events Calendar

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14

Sunny and Abe Rosenberg Lecture Series

Understanding Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents

Speaker: Glenn Hirsch, M.D., Medical Director, NYU Child Study Center

Where: The Dalton School

108 East 89th Street (Between Park & Lexington Avenues)

Time: 4:15 – 6:30 pm

Cost: Free

Register at www.AboutOurKids.org/rsvp or e-mail nyuschoolpartnership@med.nyu.edu.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21

Don't Allow Money to Ruin Your Child or Teen!

Parent Workshop with Kimberly Williams, Psy.D.

"Affluenza" describes a condition that occurs when children view the acquisition of material goods as a measure of their worth, at the expense of more enduring values. Parents across all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds are susceptible to creating a generation of at-risk adolescents, teens, and unhappy adults. Meet with Dr. Kimberly Williams to learn effective strategies to stop the cycle of affluenza. The

March 14th event focuses on children; the March 21st event focuses on teens.

Time: 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Location: 1981 Marcus Avenue, Ste. C102, Lake Success, NY

Cost: Parent Registration is \$75.00 per household

RSVP to Holly Seaman at 516-358-1808.

SAVE THE DATE!

Chuck Close, internationally celebrated painter, photographer, and printmaker, is the featured speaker at the Fifth Annual Adam Jeffrey Katz Memorial Lecture.

THURSDAY, MAY 17

5:00-6:30 pm

The Spence School

22 East 91st St.

This event is open to the public. Students, parents, and teachers are encouraged to attend. There is no fee, but registration is required. Please register online at www.AboutOurKids.org/rsvp; call (212) 263-2477; or e-mail RSVP@AboutOurKids.org.