

HANDOUT 3 – 3/3

Children's development and reactions to crisis

Child development – overview of stages

COMMON SIGNS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DISTRESS AMONG CHILDREN			
Common signs of psychosocial distress among children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common signs of distress in all age groups: • Fear that the distressing event will happen again. • Worry that dear ones will be hurt and fear of separation. • Reaction to destruction. • Sleeping problems. • Mood swings. 			
Common signs of distress in children aged 0-3 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May cling to caregivers. • Regression to younger behavior. • Changes in sleep and eating patterns. • Crying and irritability. • Afraid of things that did not frighten them before. • Hyperactivity. • Changes in play activity/play patterns. • More opposing and demanding behavior than before or overly cooperative. • Very sensitive to other people's reactions. 		Common signs of distress in children aged 4-6 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start clinging to parents or other adults. • Regress to younger behavior such as thumb-sucking. • Stop talking. • Become inactive or hyperactive. • Stop playing, or start playing repetitive games. • Feel anxious and worry that bad things are going to happen. • Experience sleep disturbances, including nightmares. • Change eating patterns. • Become easily confused. • Be unable to concentrate well. • At times, take on adult roles. • Show irritability. 	
Common signs of distress in children aged 7-12 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed level of physical activity changes. • Confused feelings and behavior. • Withdrawal from social contact. • Talk about the event in a repetitive manner. • Show reluctance to go to school. • Feel and express fear. • Experience a negative impact on memory, concentration and attention. • Have sleep and appetite disturbances. • Show aggression, irritability or restlessness. • Have physical symptoms related to emotional stress. • Concerned about other affected people. • Experience self-blame and guilt feelings. 		Common signs of distress in children aged 13-18 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel intense grief. • Feel self-conscious, or guilt and shame that they were unable to help those that were hurt. • Show excessive concerns about other affected persons. • May become self-absorbed and feel self-pity. • Changes in interpersonal relations. • Increase in risk-taking, self-destructive and/or avoidant behavior or show aggression. • Experience major shifts in their view of the world. • Feels a sense of hopelessness about the present and the future. • Become defiant of authorities and caregivers. • Start to rely more on peers for socializing. 	

For more information, see Save the Children (2013) *Psychological First Aid*