

- Help mitigate other changes in their lives.
- Address estrangement or their removal from peers and friends.
- Help children frame the trauma in the context of all of their relationships and their life as a whole.
- Help children focus on the future.
- Give concrete aid and factual information.

Source: National Organization for Victim Assistance©

Remember, involvement in a traumatic event can produce upsetting responses such as disturbed sleep, diminished appetite, and difficulty concentrating. These responses will likely subside with time. However, if reactions are especially long lasting or troubling, you may need to turn to a professional for assistance.

### Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help victims clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- The disruption due to trauma can make daily functioning difficult. Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies, allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network helps to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from the traumatic experience.

Survivors can utilize the experience as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills.

### Who can help?

The Mesa Police Department Victim Services Unit can assist with information regarding Victims' Rights, Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to other appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.

## Judicial System

For many, this may be their first involvement with law enforcement or the judicial system. It is very common for people to expect what they have seen on television or movies to apply to their current circumstances. Unfortunately, these expectations are, more than often, a distorted and unrealistic snapshot of how things truly operate.

Arizona has laws and regulations in place to protect victims. For cases involving prosecution, a court advocate can provide information, education, and support that will help reduce fears and uncertainties.

Another consideration that is often practiced is that of resolution by plea agreement. By negotiation and agreement, this approach to resolution can prevent the need for testifying in court.

As with any situation, education and information about how the judicial system operates, can assist the victim and their family in the reduction of trauma.

## Resources

### Community Information and Referral

(602) 263-8856

### EMPACT Crisis Hotline

(480) 784-1500

### Arizona Criminal Justice Commission

1110 W Washington Ste#230

Phoenix, AZ 85007

(602) 364-1146

acjc@azcjc.gov

### National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849-6000

1-800-851-3420

### Office for Victims of Crime

U.S. Department of Justice

810 Seventh Street NW., Eighth Floor

Washington, DC 20531

(202) 307-5983

www.ovc.gov

# Victim Services Unit

## Children and Trauma



Mesa Police Department  
Victim Services Unit  
130 N Robson  
Mesa, AZ 85201  
(480) 644-4075

**This brochure provides information for you and your family on dealing with trauma. (Please keep in mind that every child reacts in an individual manner and that the ages presented are a guide.)**

## Common Responses

### Birth—2 years

- High anxiety levels manifested in crying, biting, throwing objects, thumb sucking, and agitated behavior.
- It is unlikely that the child will retain a strong mental memory of the trauma.

### Pre-School (ages 2 to 6)

- Time and space is only related to concrete or personal concerns.
- The focus for children of this age is on their immediate life, taking in the catastrophe more swiftly than most adults.
- They may also believe that what they think about something can cause it to happen.

### School-age children (ages 6-10)

- The disruption in routine may cause children to experience a disruption in their own sense of identity and belonging to the world.
- Reenactment and play are often used as coping mechanisms.

This is an age when children become more conscious of right and wrong. If they think they have done something wrong to cause what happened they will feel guilt. If they think others have done something wrong, they are likely to feel violent anger. If they cannot comprehend the issues they may distance themselves from any feelings because, “it doesn’t matter.”

### Early adolescence (10-13 for girls, 12-15 for boys)

- Due to physical changes, children in this age group often talk about physical stress-related symptoms: nausea, headaches, sleep disturbances, frequent crying spells, and so on.
- The emotional roller-coaster that a child deals with at this age is expressed in wide mood swings.
- In early adolescence, children become more preoccupied with friends/peers and begin to distrust or challenge adult interpretations of the world. When they perceive adults have failed them, they may be particularly hostile to the adult world.
- There is a tendency for children to become very emotional in response to emotion-laden events at this age.
- Ideals and commitments are viewed as a sacred trust. Betrayal of promises, vows, or relationships is rarely tolerated, even when being faithful to them may be harmful to the children who

rely upon them or when the person making such vows is incapable of honoring them.

Words and symbols mean a great deal to the preadolescent and the adolescent child. Emphasize the use of stories, plays, poetry, and music lyrics often as a basis for expression.

### Adolescence (13-18)

- Normally, adolescence tends to increase the emotional upheaval of preadolescence.
- Adolescent behavior is inconsistent. Anger may manifest itself as rage, and sorrow may become suicidal.
- Involvement in risk-taking activities may be exacerbated by the loss of risk-inhibitions due to trauma. They often express themselves by acting out and through experimenting with new behaviors.
- Most adolescents are creative and energetic. Their creativity is manifested through the creation of their own symbols, activities, and words. Many young people create symbolic activities to memorialize their losses and to maintain a living connection to loved ones who have died or been injured in a catastrophe.
- Eating and sleeping disorders may develop.

## What May Help

Children naturally allow themselves to deal with crisis and trauma by confronting those issues incrementally. They tend to focus on their and distress in short time periods and then return to everyday activities. They are not prone to dwelling on events or concentrating and analyzing the aftermath. They may become overwhelmed with emotions relating to a tragedy for a while but other things often divert them.

### Seeking and relying upon help from others

Resilient children develop strategies for finding older children or adults who might help them. They will gravitate towards people who seem to provide stability and comfort. A child may actively identify a surrogate parent in the neighborhood or become especially close to a teacher or religious group leader.

### A sense of a foreshortened future

Many children after surviving trauma cannot conceptualize a long-lasting life. This can be a positive coping skill when it helps them to focus on the present. It can be a negative coping skill when they believe that they may, or can, or will die in the near future and contribute to that belief through their actions.

### Retreat into fantasy

Children often use fantasy as an escape from reality. At times their fantasies will involve seeing themselves as the savior to the

event; at other times they may imagine a loved one appearing as a superhero.

### Education and aspiration

Some children cope well because they view the traumatic event as something to overcome through their learning or physical activities. School can provide a welcome relief to a traumatized child because it is structured and the child knows what is expected. Lessons that are targeted and have definable goals help children to concentrate and adapt.

### Spirituality

Children may cope better if they have a belief in God or other spirits. When the traumatic event involves death, children may believe that they are communicating with a loved one who has died and that they see the ghost or spirit of the loved one. This is not a frightening thought to many children but a comfort as they continue to grow and develop. Some children rely upon a belief in a loving God to help them through times when they feel alone and afraid.

### Establish safety and security

- Respond to and provide opportunities for children to receive positive human physical contact to reaffirm needs for sensory comfort and care.
- Help children get enough sleep.
- Help children develop protective plans of action if another traumatic event were to occur.
- Provide them with physical symbols of nurturing, love, or remembrance.

### Allow children to tell what happened and to talk about death and loss

- Encourage them to tell or develop stories that help them explore intense reactions such as anger or fear.
- Talk with them about what they observed in the reactions of parents, peers, or other significant adults.

### Predict what will happen and prepare children for the future

- Encourage the establishment and reestablishment of comforting routines.
- Provide them with tangible comfort items: a photograph of a loved one, a stuffed animal, or a favorite blanket.
- Educate them about trauma.
- Help them develop reasons for living.
- Help them take time to think about their future.
- Support adult caregivers in their efforts to react appropriately.
- Work to help children solve problems they face because of the trauma.
- Address what can and can't be done.