



## Helping Your Children Deal with the Anniversary of Sandy

While we'd like to hope that as parents we can protect our children from the terrible things that happen in life, there are unfortunately some events that are out of our control. SuperStorm Sandy was one of them. The initial steps in getting through the event were pretty challenging for everyone involved, but somehow, most of us managed to pull it together and with the healing power of time and community support, we are trying to go on. Just when we thought some of the worst might be over, however, feelings about the event seem to get stirred up again by the year anniversary. Most media stories won't help-

you can expect that coverage will dramatically review every detail of the storm. Things you had mercifully forgotten will be there again, right before your eyes.

"At this time, last year..." you may hear someone say and the day will come rushing back with amazing clarity. We may find ourselves revisiting feelings we thought had been resolved- the disbelief, shock, and terror we experienced last year, living through the storm. For some of us, the images may reappear in disturbing dreams. Others may just seem out of sorts, easily irritated or worried. We may not even make a mental connection between our feelings and the event, yet when we do connect the dots it begins to make sense.

Our children are no different. Especially if the storm affected their community, that internal process of 'last year, at this time...' may get activated without them even understanding what's happening. Their reactions can be similar to ours- changes in behavior or preoccupation with the event, unexplained nightmares, or simply 'not being themselves'. Younger kids may be confused by images in the media and think another hurricane is on the way this year.

Of course, not every child is going to respond this way. The problem is that we don't

always know which kids are going to have upsetting reactions. And, like many of us, kids aren't that good at putting these kinds of feelings into words. We can see that something's not right by their behavior but have no clue how to figure out what it is.

So what can you do about it? Here are a few steps to guide you in talking with your children about the upcoming anniversary;

- First of all, take some time to think about your reactions. Acknowledging your own feelings is the first step in being able to help your children express theirs. For many of us, it's been a long, hard year and it can help to look back and review not just the challenges and frustrations but also the coping skills that have helped you get through. Yes, it is a cliché, but emphasizing the positive, however small it may seem, is a big step in the recovery process.
- Bring up the anniversary of the event with your children. Don't worry that you're calling attention to it- they're going to hear about it in school or in the community anyway. If you bring the subject up, you're giving your kids permission to talk about it with you. Many kids are often scared to bring up

upsetting topics for fear they will upset their parents or that their feelings will be dismissed (“Oh, you’ll get over it”; “That happened so long ago’).When you give them permission to talk about something upsetting, kids can be really relieved.

- Explain why you’re bringing the topic up. Say something like:” I know last year at about this time this really terrible and sad thing happened. I’ve been thinking about it again and I wonder if you have had any thoughts about it.” Ask if they’ve talked about Sandy in school. Find out what the word is on the street. Try to remain calm and objective, no matter what your child tells you...
- ... Or doesn’t tell you! One of the first lessons we learn as parents is that kids talk when they’re ready, not necessarily when we want them to! If your child is unresponsive, don’t get upset. Acknowledge that this may be a hard thing to talk about but you really are interested in your child’s observations. Bring up the topic again.
- Monitor television use as best you can. You can expect a lot of publicity around this anniversary and it may seem

overwhelming. It can also feel insensitive- you don’t need to be reminded about the ways in which your life was turned upside down! So don’t watch or listen- this is one of the aspects of anniversary reminders that you can control!

- Be a busy-body. Pay attention to the buzz at the soccer game or cheerleading practice and be a little more watchful of what’s happening on the internet sites your child frequents. If you hear or see anything that worries you, pursue it! Yes, your child may tell you to mind your own business but assert your rights as a parent. Your child’s business IS your business!
- Finally, recognize that you do have access to support! Even if you simply want to talk about your own reactions, don’t hesitate to reach out to the resources mentioned here. The reminders that often accompany the anniversaries of tragic events can stop any of us in our tracks. Talking with someone who can help you make sense of what you’re thinking and feeling is often a big relief- whether you’re a kid or a grown up! You are not alone!!

## RESOURCES

Here are a few of the community resources that can provide support and direction for you and your kids:

[2ndFLOOR Youth Helpline](#)  
**888-222-2228**

