

SIGNS AND INTERVENTIONS – DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS

INFANTS AND TODDLERS

PRE-SCHOOL AGERS

SCHOOL AGERS

PRE ADOLESCENTS AND ADOLESCENTS

Prepared by,
Kimberly Gerlach, LCSW, CTS
Psychotherapist, Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

It is important to understand that at each new developmental level, children add new possibilities to their response repertoire. We must remember to consider those responses from the previous level and *in addition*, look at the new possibilities.

INFANTS AND TODDLERS

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Increased irritability
Change in Appetite
Change in Sleep Pattern
Decreased activity
Other changes in personality
Withdrawal
Increased fear (toddlers)
Regression (toddlers)

Remember: Infants and Toddlers will react to the change *in you*.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

Maintain routines: Sleeping
Feeding
Bathing
Naps
Stay near
Use eye contact frequently

Remember: Take care of your own emotional responses; get the support you need so you don't communicate stress and fear.

PRE-SCHOOL AGERS

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Regression (e.g. wetting, thumb sucking)
Clinging
Withdrawal
Decreased talking (quieter)
Lethargy/increased activity
Irritability
Changes in appetite, sleep elimination
Distortions/embellishments/confusion
General fearfulness
Specific fears (monsters, darkness, animals, strangers)
Thematic play
Unexplained pains
Disobedience
Hyperactivity/short attention span
Aggressive behavior/play

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

Stick to routines/establish new routines
Maintain calm atmosphere
Console physically
Provide opportunities to express verbally and through play
Avoid separation *
Avoid challenges/new experiences
Reassure that child is safe
Talk about the normal events of life
Provide opportunity for experiencing control (choices, jobs they can do)

*If you must be away, make sure the child knows where you'll be and when you'll be back. Consider using a transitional object, your compact, your keys, something easily identifiable as yours.

SCHOOL AGERS

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Performance decline
Changes in mood
Obsessive talking/hypervocal
Attention seeking
Detailed, complex thematic play
Violent play
Distrust
Depression
Guilt (may feel somehow responsible)
Trouble with peer relations
Difficulty concentrating
Sadness

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

Be available/encourage talking
Answer questions reassuringly but honestly
Do not lie/distort
Remind that adults are working to make things better
Encourage talking, writing, drawing, telling and retelling "the story"
Maintain contact with friends
Encourage physical activity
Monitor child's play more closely
Work with school staff
Model your strength and coping by acknowledging your confusion and concern *and* your ability to go about your daily life.

PRE ADOLESCENTS AND ADOLESCENTS

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Hypervigilance
Intense emotionality
Rebellion/Opposition
Unsafe behavior/acting out
Judgmental
Low self-esteem/critical
Tension
Polarization in relationships/groups
"Survivor guilt"
Increased sibling difficulties
Frustration
Thoughts of own mortality

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

Maintain/encourage peer contacts, relationships, activities
Set/ maintain limits
Talk about symptoms/name symptoms
Allow greater phone flexibility
Delay major decisions/changes
Address harmful behavior quickly
Encourage *active* coping via fundraisers, clothing drives, etc
Consider ceremony (to acknowledge tragedy)
Rehearse safety measures
Reduce performance expectations but keep routing
Consider group discussions
Make time to be with your teen
Include teens in making a disaster plan