

Article from Dr. Henry Cloud:

I have had many calls today asking what parents can do at a time like this. Here are a few thoughts.

1. First, be close to your kids who have heard about it or were affected in some way. Traumatized and frightened children need to know their loved ones are near and connected to them. Listen, be present.
2. Kids take their cues from those close to them, so remain calm. If you are traumatized as well, process that somewhere so you can be calm and reassuring to the children. How they see you reacting will either scare them or calm them.
3. Hang out. Stay near and around.
4. Give them chances to talk and to express what they are feeling. If they have heard about it, let them talk and find out what they are thinking. You need to know what they have heard from other kids and clarify things for them.
5. Watch their behaviors for what they are not talking about: behavior changes, clinging, sleep disturbances, anxiety, fights, withdrawal, or changes in behavior. If you see these, find out what is going on and get them help if it persists.
6. Remind them that they are safe. Emphasize the "bigness" of the good guys....tell them you are there to protect them, teachers, police, firefighters, etc. They need to know that the strong people are the good guys who will keep them safe.
7. Return to normal life...routines, structure, etc. Get them together with other families to have a group hanging out together doing normal things. Make normal life very apparent to them. Structure time and activities.
8. Help them reach out to others who are affected if they are very aware of it. Write some letters or make a donation.
9. Do not let them see news reports replaying over and over. Kids do not sometimes realize that video loops playing over and over are all one event that has already happened. They will think it is happening on an ongoing basis. Get them away from the TV news. Do something fun with them.

Mainly, they need to feel the security of normal life and their loved ones. You have great power to make their world safe again.