

Press Release

August 10, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Dr. Sharon Harris

516- 676-2008

safeglencove@yahoo.com

### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: COVID-19 and Childhood Trauma**

Across the nation, individuals are being exposed to and reacting to the confusing, stressful, and sometimes frightening situation of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in different ways. According to a recent article in The Journal of Pediatrics, children can be traumatized by this unprecedented event.

Childhood trauma often involves a negative reaction, called traumatic stress, following an overwhelming, upsetting, or frightening experience—called a traumatic event—that challenges a child’s ability to cope. Traumatic events are typically situations that are out of our control, beyond our usual experience, and cause us to feel as though our lives or the lives of others may be in danger. The COVID-19 pandemic is an unusual, unexpected event that is causing many to worry and even panic. Many children are seeing and hearing frightening news on television. Some have family members or other people they know who are sick or may have died. Individual experiences can vary greatly, based on different levels of exposure. If a child’s caregivers are relatively calm and reassuring, this can be a protective factor. If, on the other hand, caregivers are overwhelmed with their own worry, panic, or grief, it can be hard to provide the reassurance children need. The way a child reacts may therefore be strongly influenced by how others around them are reacting.

Children’s reactions following a traumatic event will vary depending on their age, developmental level, degree of social support, and coping skills, among other factors. Some children show signs of traumatic stress in response to stressful events, while others don’t. Children typically under the age of 10 may replay certain thoughts or images in their mind or have an increase in nightmares—which may or may not be clearly related to the traumatic events. Children often describe feeling unable to control these thoughts or images. Some children may draw, write, talk, or play about the events repeatedly. They may struggle with a range of negative feelings including sadness, hopelessness, irritability and anger, or numbness. Some children may become overwhelmed by their feelings and act silly or younger than their age. Others may become anxious, especially when separated from caregivers. Children may also regress by displaying behaviors they had previously outgrown, such as becoming clingier, bedwetting,

separation anxiety, or having sleep difficulties or become agitated or distressed if unable to avoid, people, places, and things that remind them of what happened. Concentrating on schoolwork or other activities can become challenging.

Research has shown that while some children exhibit signs of stress in reaction to traumatic events, these symptoms will likely resolve within a few days or weeks, while some may have a more lasting impact. Researchers maintain if a child's symptoms do not decrease in two to four weeks after the event, it may be good to see a pediatric mental health professional with expertise in the treatment of trauma and evidence-based or evidence-informed treatments for treating traumatic stress.

To help children process their feelings during this unprecedented time, parents should provide developmentally appropriate information. Teenagers may want to have more information and may need to talk more. Alternatively, they may act as though nothing is bothering them and may say they do not want to talk. Researchers advise to give them space, but also keep a close eye on how they are coping, and create opportunities for discussion.

Most importantly, consistency can also help children manage their emotions in uncertain times. Maintain consistency and familiarity whenever possible with virtual school time and family routines and if that is not possible, tell the child about what changes they can expect.

Children are tuned into their parents' reactions, and it is important to model healthy expression of emotion. Parents can briefly share how they are feeling and how they manage difficult feelings. It is helpful to let children know that parents can also be sad or worried while reassuring them they are there for them no matter what.

The Journal of Pediatrics is a peer-reviewed medical journal that covers all aspects of pediatrics. To learn more please visit [www.jpeds.com](http://www.jpeds.com).

To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the COVID-19 Pandemic at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).