

EAP

Employee Assistance Program

TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT ANTHRAX

- 1) **Try to answer questions that your children ask, honestly, directly and in a timely manner.** If you don't know an answer to a question – tell your children you don't have the answer. If the question is answerable and getting the answer would help you and your child, try to find time (together possibly) to search out the answer.
- 2) **Consider reaching out to children who are not asking questions to discuss what is happening, what they think and how they feel about it.**
Any child who is going to school, communicating with people outside of the house and watching TV, most likely is hearing some information about anthrax. It is usually best for children to get information directly from their parents. Lack of information and not giving “permission” to talk about things can encourage fear and misunderstanding.
- 3) **Like talking about any important subject, it is VERY helpful to directly acknowledge what your children have to say.** It may seem silly, but it is very helpful to just “say back” to people, perhaps with a slight rephrasing, what they say to you about important things. This shows the person that you listened, heard and understood. It often encourages someone to talk more.
- 4) **Continue to talk with your children at their own level of understanding.**
For young children you can talk about “people who have become sick because of germs.”
For older children, talk about “bacterial infection.”
- 5) **Share your feelings honestly with your children.** “I hate what is happening, but I feel safe and I am confident that I can keep you safe.” “What happened scares me. I'm going to do everything I can to keep all of us safe.”
- 6) **Offer all the realistic reassurance that you can.**
 - “Anthrax is not passed from person to person. I feel confident that you and everyone else in our family is safe.”
 - “I have no symptoms and have not worked anywhere where there has been an exposure to anthrax.”
 - “I have not worked in the areas that health officials are concerned about.”
 - “I am taking medicine as a preventative measure because a few people in my facility did get sick. I have not been sick.”
- 7) **Be prepared to address tough questions and requests.** Your child may ask you not to go to work. Acknowledge the concern in the request and explain your decision for continuing to work. For example “I know you are feeling scared and concerned and that you love me and don't want anything bad to happen to me. I am going to continue to do everything I can to keep myself safe while continuing to make money that we use to pay for things we need.”

- 8) **Help your children to keep the problem in its proper perspective.** Children observe the world with “all or nothing” thinking. Take care to be sure that children understand that only a few people have contracted anthrax.
- 9) **Encourage your children to continue to talk with you and let you know how they are feeling whenever they like.**
- 10) **Offer physical reassurance** – hugs, time together.
- 11) **Continue to use your parenting skills, knowledge of your child and family traditions to reaffirm your love for one another. Offer one another support and comfort.**