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Fall Newsletter 2001

Dear Fellow M.I.P.A. Members:

When I began to write this Newsletter, I was very excited to begin my second year as president of the Michigan Inter-Professional Association and to inform our members of the exciting year that lied ahead.

My excitement quickly turned to shock as I watched terrorists attack the United States on September 11, 2001. Like many other Americans, I remained glued to my television for the next several days. During those days, I grieved along with the entire country. However, I soon found that my grieving was constantly being interrupted by friends, family and clients who also needed my assistance in dealing with their own feelings. This pattern repeated itself on a regular basis. I then quickly realized that all of the members of the M.I.P.A. are going to find themselves over the next several months being looked upon by others to help them get through the worst chapter in United States history. The fact that President Bush has sent a very clear message that the United States has declared war on terrorism, will only result in more concern for many of those that we have contact with on a daily basis. As an Association, we need to remain strong, educated and available to those who need us.

Before any of us as Judges, Lawyers, Mental Health Professionals or Parents can help anyone else deal effectively with the horror of the terrorist events of last week, we must first deal with our own fears and feelings. Before we can reassure others around us, we need to get our own act together. How we react and behave ourselves is a message to those who look up to us. We must remain calm and keep our own perspective. Only then can we help ease the fear of others around us.

In reading the many articles that have appeared during the past several days, I have made notes for myself on recognizing signs of trauma and gathering suggestions on how to help others cope with tragic events in their life.

Initially, one must understand that trauma can destroy an individuals sense of safety and security. As professionals we must look for signs that a patient, client, friend or family member may be in trauma. We must also be especially sensitive to the warning signs we see in children. According to William Steele, Director of the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, warning signs for trauma in children may be evidenced by any of the following:

1. Regularly sleeping on the floor, not the bed
2. Clinging to a parent
3. Terrified of being alone
4. Accident-prone
5. Easily startled
6. Having flash backs
7. Traumatic dreams of dying or being hurt
8. Return to behaviors that stopped when younger
9. Difficulty concentrating
10. Decline in school grades

11. Angry outbursts or fighting
12. Emotionally detached, develops a pessimistic view of the future or loses hope
13. Showing no fear when appropriate
14. Repeatedly telling the event
15. Headaches, stomach problems, fatigue and other ailments

Many of the above warning signs also apply to adults.

In order to help others deal with their emotions, especially children, many experts suggest the following:

1. **DISTINGUISH BETWEEN YOUR FEELINGS AND YOUR CHILDREN'S FEELINGS.** For parents, one of the most challenging things about this kind of a disaster is the fact that we are having our own reactions at the same time we are called upon to respond to our children. Children are highly influenced by our emotions. In order for us to clearly focus on what they need, we must find ways to explore, acknowledge and express our own feelings. For some of us, that may mean talking to friends, family members, clergy or professional counselors. For others, it may be crying, writing or finding ways to take meaningful actions. Only after adults can find some form of stability, can they give children the kind of attention they need to explore their feelings and make sense of this tragedy.
2. **SHARE YOUR FEELINGS WITH CHILDREN IN AGE APPROPRIATE WAYS.** Children learn about the world through their parents and caregivers, as well as through their own direct experiences. However, children who don't share many of our adult life experiences, will most likely have very different perceptions and reactions to this tragedy. We need to communicate to children on a level that they can understand.
3. **LISTEN CLOSELY TO YOUR CHILDREN.** Listen with your eyes and your ears. Watch for changes in behavior, withdrawing, fighting, crying, clinging and the other signs of trauma as outlined above. Make yourself available and give your children the gift of listening. Do not offer advice until you really know what your children are thinking and feeling.
4. **HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS.** Learning to recognize what we are feeling is not an easy task, especially for children. If you see a child is struggling, you can ask them "Can you tell me about your feelings?", or "You look like you might be sad." We must get our children to express themselves and talk about what they are feeling.
5. **ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS.** Sometimes children need encouragement to keep talking. You can ask open-ended questions such as "How do you think those people feel?" or "What do you think will happen next?"
6. **REMEMBER THAT TALKING AND EXPRESSING FEELINGS IS PART OF THE HEALING PROCESS.** It may feel worrisome to see our children in fear and anger. However, expression of feelings is the most powerful healing tool that we have. Keeping feelings tucked inside will only lead to confusion, misdirection and poor health.
7. **BE SMART ABOUT HOW MUCH MEDIA YOUR CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO.** Depending on their age, children will naturally be exposed to various types of media coverage. For younger children, you may want to limit the images they see. They can be very fascinated, but scared about what they are watching. For older children, it is

important that you watch, listen or read coverage with them. That way, you can talk to them about their fears, questions and concerns when they come up.

8. **TAKE ACTION.** While many of us experience feelings of powerlessness right now, there are things we can do. We can make a difference by sending help directly to those affected; offering support to families who are fearful and stressed; or taking social stands against such things as racism or in support of such things like patriotism.
9. **SPEND TIME AS A FAMILY.** Your kids need you more than anything right now. Limit time spent watching television or playing video games and spend more time with your family. In a crisis, children need to feel connected. Maintain a daily routine. This is soothing for children and adults alike.
10. **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF BY YOUR CALM WILL BENEFIT YOUR CHILD.** Do what you need to do to help yourself center and soothe yourself, so that you can soothe your child.

America will never be the same. The tragedy of September 11, 2001, will have an impact on everyone of us. As professionals, we need to recognize that and accept that. We also need to learn how to deal with this tragedy and help assist others in the healing process. The Michigan Inter-Professional Association was founded upon the idea of professionals coming together to help strengthen family life. The Michigan Inter-Professional Association remains committed to this goal and to helping families. As an Association, we must work together now more than ever to help those who need us.

In light of the terrible events of this week, the Board of Directors of the Michigan Inter-Professional Association has unanimously agreed to donate \$1,000 to the American Red Cross and the United Way to help provide aid to those families most seriously affected by this disaster.

Very truly yours,

Michael A. Robbins

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