



# PSYCHOANALYSIS

***in Cleveland***

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## ***PSYCHOANALYSTS RESPOND TO THE NATIONAL CRISIS***

In the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack and in the midst of the war efforts, psychoanalysts across the country have been responding to individual and group requests for guidance as to how to understand and help. As an example, the website of The American Psychoanalytic Association features an article by Paul Brinich, Ph.D., Child and Adolescent Psychoanalyst in North Carolina and former Clevelander, containing suggestions for helping children deal with the reality of the events. It also lists numerous links to other websites providing advice on how to talk to and help children during disasters, some which are sponsored by psychoanalysts. Members of the Association for Child Psychoanalysis, too, have been contributing their expertise in a variety of venues. Other websites address the needs of other vulnerable populations, such as people who have experienced major catastrophes, victims of any kind of violence, veterans, patients with mental disorders, and their families.

Individual psychoanalysts have a variety of perspectives and approaches to share in response to requests for help and some have additional training in disaster relief. There has been discussion about the difference between "trauma" and "stress," as well as much thought given to the variety of ways in which different individuals have been impacted by the events. For many of us, the event has changed our perception of the reality within which we have been operating, has threatened defenses, and has stirred up our own feelings and impulses in a way that makes us feel less certain of our own capacities to navigate through and master life's

challenges. We feel both anxious as to real external threats and by the threats of what has been stirred up within ourselves. Psychoanalysts can bring their understanding of the way in which external reality interfaces with internal experiences in their efforts to help people process their own distress and understand that of others.

Another topic of discussion has revolved around parents' requests for information as to how to talk with their children about the events. It has been important to keep in mind that there is no one way to protect and respond to children and no list of symptoms that can be identified as specific reactions to the event. Even more so than with adults, children's reactions to the event are highly colored by their developmental stage, their as yet incomplete perception of reality, their primary relationships, and the experiences they associate with the event. Younger children are more impacted by their parents' reactions than to the news of the event; adolescents can be highly impacted by the way in which their teachers and peers discuss the event. Psychoanalytic understanding of personality development can help parents, educators, and other professionals to protect, listen to and discuss the event with children of different ages.

Analysts have also been mindful that, given the highly individualized nature of people's reactions to the stress, they can best be helpful within the context of relationships that offer people an opportunity for ongoing dialogue. A natural reaction to the experience of helplessness and anxiety is to want to take action. Action can be necessary and effective. In the

form of RE-Action, without sufficient thought, however, it can end up creating more problems than it solves. Failures to identify where our anxieties are coming from can result in actions in the workplace that are misguided. Wishes to get as much information as possible can end up overwhelming us and our children instead of helping us. Efforts to say the right thing to children can obscure our abilities to listen and hear what they are experiencing. Instead of speaking out too quickly and generally, psychoanalysts can help us to, instead, stop and reflect before taking action. They can help us find ways to contain the anxiety, tolerate our helplessness, and come up with more effective means of addressing the very serious issues we are facing.

Here in Cleveland, psychoanalysts have been responding to immediate requests for assistance and formulating ways to be more available to help with the distress that many experience. In this issue of the Newsletter, there are several articles describing our responses: Katan Treatment Center staff address the availability of therapists to help with individual reactions to the events; the Educational Director of the Hanna Perkins School describes how the school helped parents and children in the immediacy of the event; and a representative of the Hanna Perkins Center Extension Division describes programs offered to parent groups which help parents respond to children's reactions to the events. Analysts at the Hanna Perkins Center [HPC] and The Cleveland Psychoanalytic Society have addressed peoples' questions and reactions related to the national

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