

# String of tragedies can have cumulative effect

Constant exposure to news, images can lead to serial trauma, especially in children

It started with Hurricane Sandy, with high winds and flooding tearing through the Northeast. Then there was the blizzard, which dumped more than 30 inches in parts of Eastern Connecticut. Next was the horrific Newtown shooting, which left 20 children and six adults dead, and the rest of our state and nation shaken at the horror of it all. Now, the Boston Marathon bombing, with its graphic injuries and terrorist ties.

We are witnessing a tragic part of history before our very eyes, and are doing so at a non-stop rate that may be unhealthy. Because of the immediacy of television and prevalence of social media, images come at us around-the-clock. And it's all so-close to home.

Experts say exposure to such a string of catastrophes can cause what is known as "serial trauma." Although symptoms may not be obvious right away, the psychological toll can present in subtle ways, such as feeling sad or angry and not knowing why.

The impact can be particularly severe among children. Compounding the problem following the Boston terrorist bombing is that many children were on school vacation, and might have been exposed to more news coverage than they normally would.

Most experts say children under 9 may not yet have the coping strategies to deal with tragedies, and their exposure to information about them should be limited. The easiest way to do this is to leave the television off.

Horrible events can create anxiety in children. Add in the facts that the Boston incident is nearby, and that one of the victims was an 8-year-old boy, and it becomes worse.

For older children, though, the situation can create an opportunity to talk to them so they are not traumatized.

Here are some tips from the Backus Department of

Psychiatric Services about talking with children about disasters:

- Encourage them to talk about how they feel, and ask questions.
- Answer questions straightforwardly. If you don't have the answer, admit it and try to get it for them later.
- Acknowledge their fears, but reassure them that these incidents are not common, and



■ **Emergency Medical Services and first responders played a major role at the Boston Marathon and at Backus throughout the year. May is National Trauma Awareness Month, a time to thank EMS for all they do throughout the year.**



## Boston blasts raise awareness

■ The Boston Marathon terrorist bombing raises the question "What if it happened here?" From Emergency Management training to established processes in the Backus Trauma Center, hospitals need to be prepared to handle disasters and the mass casualties that can come along with them. To learn more, watch our video featuring Backus Trauma Center Medical Director Dr. David Coletti and Associate Administrator Andrew Ellis, who oversees emergency management at Backus at [backushospital.org](http://backushospital.org).

that they are safe. For example, many schools have security measures in place to stop something like this from happening.

■ Point out the positive. The first responders to the shooting were heroes, much like the 9-11 firefighters. Remind them that most people are good.

■ Limit their exposure to tragic events in the media, especially television. If they are exposed to media reports or graphic images, try to be with them so you can explain to them what they are seeing, hearing or reading. If you don't, they could become confused and frightened.

Having an open dialogue with your children can help put the situation into context, and ease fears that can result from such terrible events, especially when they occur repeatedly and are close to home.



From Boston to Sandy to the Blizzard of 2013 and Newtown, our region has had its fair share of calamities to cope with. Because of the immediacy of television and prevalence of social media, images come at us around-the-clock and it may be unhealthy in the long run.