

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD/YOUTH FOLLOWING A TRAUMATIC EVENT

When children and youth are exposed to traumatic situations (situations that are experienced as overwhelming, and/or life threatening), there are several things that their caregivers can do to support them.

How students react to events will vary based upon individual and environmental factors.

Caregivers can help children to recover from trauma by assisting them to feel safe and secure, as well as by helping them to establish a sense of security and routine moving forward.

Did you know?
Everyone reacts differently to a traumatic event.

Did you know?
Safety & Security helps support healing.

What to Expect When Your Child/Youth Has Been Exposed to a Traumatic Event

Trauma responses vary depending on age, past experiences, and individual characteristics. Support from a caring adult after the event encourages resiliency and minimizes possible negative impacts.”

Common reactions to traumatic world or community events:

- sadness
- anxiety
- fears
- guilt
- anger
- irritability
- fatigue
- physical complaints

You may also notice that your child:

- Is demonstrating behaviours that appear immature or age inappropriate. This is called regression
- Appears more fearful
- Has nightmares or difficulties sleeping
- Has flashbacks, or describes reliving or vividly remembering their experience
- Becomes “hypervigilant” (i.e., becomes very watchful for danger)





Tips to Support Children/Youth After a Traumatic Event

Reassure your child/youth that what they are experiencing is real and valid. Let them know they are safe.

Do your best to remain calm and in control of your emotions and actions. Children/youth need caring adults around them to guide and help them.

Check in and listen. Where developmentally appropriate, it is ok to ask children and youth what they know about an event, what they are thinking or feeling, and whether they have any questions.

Invite your child/youth to express their feelings (i.e., talking, drawing, writing or playing).

It is ok to let your child/youth know how you are feeling, and it is also important to share hopeful messages with them. Let them know that there is safety and strength in their family, school, and community.

Try to limit the amount of media coverage of traumatic events viewed. Watching events replayed can be overwhelming, particularly for individuals who may be prone to worrying. Find the balance between too little and too much information.

Maintain a normal routine wherever possible. Predictability is comforting for children/youth and youth and helps them to feel more secure.

Pay special attention to children/youth who have experienced previous trauma or loss, or who struggle with anxiety or mood-related symptoms.

Watch for signs of distress - this could include difficulties sleeping, a change in mood, behaviour, or appetite. Remember that some children/youth may not express their worry verbally.

Suggestions for Sharing Age Appropriate Information with Children and Youth

- Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate, factual, and clear.
- Provide only what the child/youth is requesting, needing or is ready to hear.
- Primary-aged students need brief, simple information, and to know caring adults are there to protect them.
- Intermediate-aged students may ask more questions about their safety. Discuss specific ways that you and their school communities are ensuring safety.
- Secondary-aged students may have strong and varying opinions about traumatic events. Ask them what they know, and ensure they have access to accurate information.
- Emphasize the importance that all have in maintaining safety in our families, communities, and schools. This will help to ease feelings of anxiety and vulnerability.

LEARN MORE

Helping Children Cope with Frightening News, developed by the Child Mind Institute is a resource that provides parents with suggestions that will aid their children in processing feelings of grief and fear in healthy ways. <https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-cope-frightening-news/>

Helping School Aged Children with Traumatic Grief is an important parent resource designed to recognize and help their child with traumatic grief. This resource has been developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network(NCTSN). <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/helping-school-age-children-traumatic-grief-tips-caregivers>