



Tips for Supporting Children and Youth During and After a Crisis Event

When a crisis event occurs, it is important to consider the impact that it may have on students' sense of security and well-being. Students may be confused about what has happened. The reactions of the adults to such troubling situations can shape how children and youth experience these events and can influence their perception of safety. It is the role of the adults to support children and youth and to help them cope by listening, acknowledging and validating feelings. In doing so, please consider the following:

- **Model calm.** Children and youth take their emotional cues from significant adults in their lives. It's okay for children and youth to see that adults are sad or upset, but try not to show intense emotions as this might frighten them.
- **Reassure your child that they are safe.** Emphasize that home and school are safe places for them to be. Reassure them that you and other adults will take care of them. Support them in managing their fears.
- **Pray together.** Praying for people who are suffering is a way of honouring them, and provides people an opportunity to help others in a tragic event. Prayer is a way to find clarity in the chaos by turning to God when we feel pain and anxiety. Prayer grounds us in God's mission and reminds us that God is active in the world.
- **Limit exposure to media coverage.** Limit television viewing and do not show visual graphic images as exposure to a lot of details about the crisis can be disturbing and overwhelming. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, especially for young children.
- **Be a good listener – follow their lead.** Make time to talk, but don't force discussion with children and teens. If they are not focused on the tragedy, do not dwell on it. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide.
- **Allow your child to express their thoughts and fears.** Every child is entitled to his or her own feelings. Regardless of what emotion is being expressed, it is important for your child to feel heard and to believe that their feelings are accepted. As feelings are discussed, help your child to put their feelings into perspective. Children and teens don't always talk about their feelings readily. Some prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.
- **Respond to questions asked by your child.** Do not offer more information than what is sought. Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate. Young children need brief, simple information that is balanced with reassurances that the daily routines of their lives will be maintained, as much as possible.
- **Monitor children's emotional state.** Young people respond to crises in unique ways and a wide range of reactions are possible, including anger, confusion, fear or sadness. If you are concerned about an intense reaction or changes in a child or youth's behavior, appetite or sleep patterns, seek support through a family doctor or mental health professional.



- **Maintain communication between home and school.** Children may be under a great deal of stress that can be disruptive to learning. Together, parents and teachers can determine what extra support or leniency a student may need and work together to develop a plan to help. Parents can also speak to the school principal about community resources and about additional supports available through the school.
- **Emphasize people’s resiliency, humanity and compassion.** Help children understand the ability of people to come through a difficult event and go on with their lives. Focus on children’s own competencies in terms of how they have coped in daily life during difficult times. Highlight people’s compassion and humanity. Focus on the help and hopeful thoughts being offered to those affected.
- **Maintain a normal routine.** Maintain as much continuity and normalcy as possible in home and school routines. Encourage children and youth to keep up with schoolwork and extra-curricular activities, but don’t push them if they seem overwhelmed.
- **Monitor your own stress level.** Don’t ignore your own feelings of shock, worry, anger or grief. Talk to supportive people, including friends and family. It may also be important to seek support from a mental health professional to cope with overwhelming feelings. You will be better able to support children and youth if you can express your own emotions in a healthy manner. Model self-care, including healthy eating, sleep and exercise.

Sources:

- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/talking-to-children-about-violence-tips-for-parents-and-teachers>
- <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Tips-for-Talking-With-and-Helping-Children-and-Youth-Cope-After-a-Disaster-or-Traumatic-Event-A-Guide-for-Parents-Caregivers-and-Teachers/SMA12-4732>