

How you can help children you know?

Here are some ideas that might be of help to you as a parent, relative or friend.

- Be a good listener. Allow your child to feel listened to and understood.
- Answer questions as honestly and accurately as you can in words your children will understand.
- Maintain familiar routines and structures. These provide a sense of security.
- Be patient and calm, if possible. Your child, or children you have contact with, may behave in a 'younger way' and may become difficult to manage. This is natural.
- Allow children opportunities to talk about their feelings and let them know it is OK to cry.
- Be open and honest in communicating your feelings. It's OK for children to see you are upset. Explain, in simple terms, that such events upset everyone.
- Treat your children in your usual way. You may wish to be especially protective. This is a natural reaction but in the longer term being too protective can make a child feel insecure.
- Be ready to LISTEN but do not be upset if your children choose not to talk. They might express their feelings in another way through play or in their behaviour.

Make time for yourself and make sure that you have other adults to talk over your feelings and concerns. Your children will benefit from this.

Where can you get help?

Children's reactions to what happened will vary a great deal. For some, the feelings of distress will be short-lived as they and the people around them gradually adjust to the tragedy. For others, the reactions may be more severe and long-lasting. There will also be those who seem to have recovered but who begin to suffer later on.

Some children and their parents might benefit from talking to someone outside the family.

Further Help

If you want help, please contact:
Head Teacher

Child Bereavement UK
www.childbereavementuk.org/

Samaritans. (Tel: 116 123).

Resources

Leaflet: Supporting Children after a frightening event by David Trickey. The link:

www.davidtrickey.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/aftertheevent280410.pdf

Book: The Swallow, The Owl and The Sandpiper by Claire Maitland, Rodger McPhail

Remember - these are normal reactions to abnormal events

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A guide for Parents, Relatives and Friends

What can we say to our children when something dreadful has happened?



With grateful thanks and acknowledgements to Cognus Ltd, for allowing us to share their information.

Everyone involved in the incident will be affected in some way. Each person's experiences of the event will be personal and therefore different.

You may experience a range of thoughts and feelings, that don't seem to quite make sense. Some of your past feelings may intensify the emotions.

These are NORMAL reactions to an ABNORMAL event and they may last for some time.

Emotional responses

It is normal to feel a range of intense emotions following a traumatic event. You may experience one or many of the following:

Shock and disbelief: Feeling numb, as though the event is unreal or like a dream.

Anger: 'Why him or her?' 'It's so unfair!'

Fear: of 'losing control' or 'breaking down'.of the unpredictability of life.

Shame: for being so helpless & 'emotional' for not reacting as you wished to.

Memories: of people close to you who have died or are absent.

Guilt: "It was my fault".

"It should have happened to me"

"What could I have done more?"

Possible physical responses

Tiredness.

Sleep disturbance, nightmares, vivid dreams.

Headaches.

Loss of or increase of appetite.

Bowel or bladder problems.

Going through the day automatically.

Being hyper-vigilant.

Depression.

Flashbacks and intrusive memories.

Difficulty concentrating and forgetfulness.

Being easily upset or irritable.

Coping with your feelings

Open and honest communication has helped people cope more effectively. It is important to talk to others. Crying is natural and often gives relief. It is OK for others to see that you are upset.

You may need to have time on your own for private thoughts – explain to your family and friends so they will understand.

Accidents are more likely to occur when you are under stress; please be careful and take your time.

How might your child react?

In tragic situations children and young people experience similar feelings to adults. They have a need for support in coming to terms with traumatic events but they might not be able to express feelings when they cannot find the words. Children, particularly young children, often show their feelings through changes in behaviour.

These behaviours might include:

- Increased misbehaviour, aggression and 'young' behaviour.
- Children may become withdrawn.
- Lots of 'pretend' play including a desire to act out details of what took place in the original incident.
- Sleep disturbance, including bad dreams, fear of being alone, fear of the dark.
- Clinginess, including a desire to sleep with parents.
- Difficulty concentrating especially in school. Children might forget things or have toileting accidents.
- Heightened alertness to danger, including sensitivity to loud noises.
- Changes in appetite
- Fears for their own safety or the safety of family and friends.
- Reluctance to talk. Children, particularly older children, may choose not to talk for fear of upsetting family or friends.
- Being easily upset by everyday events.
- Unwillingness to go to school.