

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

Threats of violence can alter a person's sense of security. Below are a few tips that may assist you while helping children and youth to feel safe.

Be reassuring. Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Your reactions are most important. Recognize that some children and youth may be concerned about something bad happening to themselves, family or friends. Explain to them the safety measures in place and reassure them that you and other adults will take care of them.

Be a good listener and observer. Let children guide you to learn how concerned they are or how much information they need. If they are not focused on the stressful event, do not dwell on it. However, be available to answer their questions to the best of your ability. Young children may not be able to express themselves verbally. Pay attention to changes in their behavior or social interactions.

Monitor the news. Images of a crisis event can become overwhelming, especially if watched repetitively. Young children in particular may not be able to distinguish between images on television or social media and their personal reality. Older children may choose to watch the news, but be available to discuss what they see and to help put it into perspective. **IMPORTANT:** Given the recent number of school lock down events related to threats posted on social media, the Public are asked by local Police to not interact with any suspects via social media.

Emphasize people's resiliency. Help children understand the ability of people to come through a stressful event and go on with their lives. Focus on children's own competencies in terms of how they coped in daily life during difficult times. In age-appropriate terms, identify other crises from which people, communities, or countries have recovered.

Highlight people's compassion and humanity. Threats of violence often generate a tremendous outpouring of caring and support from around the communities, province and country. Focus on the help and hopeful thoughts being offered to those affected by other people.

Maintain as much continuity and normalcy as possible. Allowing children and youth to deal with their reactions is important but so is providing a sense of normalcy. Routine family activities, attending school and classes, after-school activities, and friends can help children feel more secure and better able to function.

Spend family time. Being with family is always important in difficult or sad times. Even if your children are not significantly impacted by this tragedy, this may be a good opportunity to participate in and to appreciate family life. Doing things together reinforces children's sense of stability and connectedness.

Do something positive with your children to help others in need. Taking action is one of the most powerful ways to help children feel more in control and to build a stronger sense of connection. Suggestions include making individual donations to prevention or support agencies, holding a school or community fundraiser, or even working to support families in need within the community.

Ask for help if you or your children need it. These situations can feel overwhelming for families directly affected. Staying connected to your community can be extremely helpful. It may also be important to seek additional support from a mental health professional to cope with overwhelming feelings.

Communicate with your school. Children and youth directly impacted may be under a great deal of stress that can be very disruptive to learning. Together, parents and teachers can determine what extra support or leniency students need and work with parents to develop a plan to help student. Your school child and youth worker, Board Mental Health Lead, Central Mental Health Team Member or a community counselor can also provide extra support. Also at secondary school a Chaplaincy Leader, Student Success Teacher and/or Guidance Counsellor can provide extra support.

Be aware of your own needs. Don't ignore your own feelings of anxiety, fear, grief and anger. Talking to friends, family members, religious leaders, and mental health counselors can help. It is important to let your children know that you are sad. Understand that if you have been directly impacted as a guardian, parent or staff, just getting through the day can be overwhelming. You will be better able to support your children if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner. Get appropriate sleep, nutrition, and exercise.