

Helping children and adults cope with recent world events

Recent tragic events have caused unrest throughout the world, which has left many people feeling a sense of loss, frustration, hopelessness and fear. Tragic events can cause a range of intense physical, emotional and psychological symptoms. People often experience shock and disbelief immediately after the traumatic event and find it difficult to accept the reality of what is happening.

Normal behavioral responses

- Can vary widely
- Regressive behavior
- Repetitive questions
- More crying and tearfulness
- Disturbing dreams
- Fluctuating moods
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Aggressive acting out
- Sleep disturbance, disturbing dreams, nightmares
- Changes in eating patterns and appetite
- Clinging to parents/caregivers

Tips for adults

- **Engage in positive activities.** Try to engage in positive, healthy, or meaningful activities, even if they are small, simple actions. Doing things that are rewarding, meaningful, or enjoyable, even if you don't feel like it, can make you feel better.
- **Stay connected.** Spend time with people who give you a sense of security, calm, or happiness, or those who best understand what you are going through.
- **Practice good self-care.** Look for positive coping strategies that help you manage your emotions. Listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling, or reading inspirational text are some simple ways to help manage overwhelming or distressing emotions.

- **Stick to your routines.** It can be helpful to stick to a schedule for when you sleep, eat, work, and do other day-to-day activities.
- **Limit media exposure.** Limit how much news you take in if media coverage is increasing your distress.

Tips for parents, caregivers and school counselors

- As parents, speak to your child about these types of incidents, openly and honestly, adapting the conversation to the age of the child or developmental level the child is at.
- As parents, monitor their exposure to the media coverage.
- For parents, be aware of where your child is or what they may hear during adult conversation about the situation or issue at hand. Do your best to not have children overhear adult conversations on phones, video chats, and on social media.
- For parents, be in communication with school/caregivers to monitor reactions in these settings.
- Give a lot of affection and nurturing as appropriate.
- Encourage children to express their feelings verbally and through play, art, stories – don't force the issue.
- Validate, normalize and empathize.
- Maintain normal routines as much as possible.
- Give choices about the amount of involvement in rituals/events related to the incident.
- Recognize that there may be a need for repetition regarding the event; be patient and gentle.
- Give reassurance, i.e. "rare incident," but not false promises, i.e. "this will never happen to you."
- While maintaining composure, don't be afraid to share your feelings.
- Be prepared with resources should the issues be out of scope with what the adults can deal with.
- Remember that children have emotional radar, and they will pick up your emotions and feelings, so try to stay calm and practice good self-care.

What children need to know

- They are not alone.
- Things will return to normal.
- All your feelings are normal and OK.
- It's OK to cry – it's even OK to be happy.
- You have handled problems before, and you have what it takes to handle this one, too.
- They need to use their support systems; discuss what those are.
- Talk about it with parents, other relatives, teachers and friends.
- Find appropriate ways to express feelings – discuss what some of those are.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Let their parents, teachers or other adults know if they feel scared, angry or sad.
- Spend time with friends.

- Reach out to others.
- They can self soothe i.e. deep breathing to calm themselves down. Practice with them.
- Stay busy.
- Avoid watching too much TV shows or limited social media exposure about what has occurred or looking a picture of the disaster.

Signs that more help is needed

- When the normal behavior responses above go on for an extended period of time.
- Regressive behavior persists over time.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.
- A drop-in school performance and/or refusal to attend school.
- Behavioral responses are persistently interfering with the child's ability to function in any major area of life; school, relationships, health, etc.