

Advice for Parents supporting children and young people exposed to a potential traumatic event.

- Children may wish to 'talk' about the event in different ways – some will use language, some will use play and others may prefer to write or draw
- It is wise for you to monitor your child's exposure to television coverage, print media and social media
- Some children and young people will want to talk about the event or what has occurred. They will continue to try to make sense of what they have both seen and heard
- Other children will avoid any discussion around the events and will be reassured by routine and normality
- Remember the importance of routine, sleep, exercise and healthy eating. Children need boundaries and limits in place. This helps to restore predictability, safety and security
- Be mindful of the emotional and developmental level of your child. You know them best and if their behavior is out of character
- School staff will always ensure that the safety of children and young people are their first priority. An event may occur at a school that will result in an evacuation or lockdown to keep students safe. This may be upsetting for some students, especially young children. This may see your child reluctant to go to school. If this occurs let the teacher know.

There is a range of things you can do to assist your child or young person including:

- Listen to your child or young person's retelling of the events
- Allow your child to take the lead – they will guide the discussion, give them time to ask questions, discuss their feelings and emotions
- You can validate their feelings by listening to them
- The fears usually diminish in a short time
- Reassure children that they are safe
- Look for signs of distress (e.g. some children/young people might be scared/withdrawn/nervous/curious)
- There may be some behavior changes – angry outburst, withdrawal, and hypervigilance, reluctance to leave their parents or carers

- Normalise responses - typical response will range from anger to general upset or sadness, and may include regression in behavior
- Maintain a normal routine - keeping the structure at home or at school in place
- Allow children to express feelings as they arise
- Telling stories about how people manage during difficult times can be helpful
- Separate fact from fiction e.g. children may express fears about unrelated events
- Plan relaxing activities before bed – talk your child through a gentle relaxation, this might include using soothing music and talking them through relaxing tension in their body or simply reading something to them that induces relaxation (i.e. a favorite book)
- Speak in hopeful terms – children and young people will often take their cues from their parents' reactions; if you are honest, calm, compassionate and open they will be much more able to trust that they will be okay
- Always remember the value of doing something with children that they like to do such as playing, exercising, being outdoors - have a time during your day to share time with your child.

Additional Resources

Kidsmatter

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters>

Kids Helpline

www.kidshelpline.com.au

Parentline Victoria

www.education.vic.gov.au/earlychildhood/parentline