

Tips for

TALKING WITH AND SUPPORTING Children, Teens, & Young Adults *After a Disaster or Traumatic Event*

Children and youth can face emotional strains after a traumatic event or disaster. This can happen when they experience a trauma, watch it on TV, or overhear others discussing it. They can feel scared, confused, or anxious. This tip sheet is designed to provide some tips on how parents, caregivers, and teachers can support children and young adults in their life, following a traumatic event.

TRAUMA: Trauma is an emotional response to a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

GRIEF: Grief is a strong, sometimes overwhelming emotion for people, regardless of whether their sadness stems from the loss of a loved one or from a different type of loss, like the loss of safety.

RESPONSES MAY BE COMPLEX AND INCLUDE:

- Anxiety, fear, avoidance, hyper vigilance
- Fear can linger after the actual traumatic event has occurred
- Children may see the world as a place of danger



TALKING WITH CHILDREN:

- **Create a safe place.** Is the news allowing continued exposure? Are they in a comfortable environment like their home? Make sure you are in a good headspace to speak with them, these conversations may be emotional for you as well. Remind them that you are safe now.
- **Allow an expression of feelings.** Accept their feelings and responses, even if you might feel a different way. Create a safe place for them to express their feelings and let them sit with what you have discussed. Remember, children take a longer time to process information than adults can. "It's okay if you are not ready to talk, I am here when you are ready."
- **Follow your child's lead.** Do not show what you need, find out what they need.
- **Let the child explain in their own words.** They can use play, drawing, or words. "I know something scary happened, do you know what happened?" If they mention they heard something from a friend, ask, "what did your friend tell you?"
- **Use connections to cope.** Reconnect with friends and family, give your child a sense of community and keep your routines as much as possible (children need consistency and will do well with a sense of normalcy).
- **Be present.** Your child needs you and your presence is powerful. It's okay to not know what to say sometimes, just being there can be enough, be their anchor. If you mess up, it's always okay to go back and update them with something new.



GUIDELINES BASED ON AGE:

PRESCHOOL

One sentence approach with straightforward language. "Something bad happened, but people are making sure everyone is okay, you are safe right now."

SCHOOL AGE

Balance questions and worries. "That was scary, something bad happened and people got hurt, do you have any questions?"

ADOLESCENTS

*Focus on feelings. "That was scary, how can we help the community?"
Teens like a sense of empowerment and action.*

YOUNG ADULTS

Allow them to still come to you for comfort and support. They may want to act "strong," let them know you are there.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- Changes in feelings, behaviors, physical symptoms and thoughts.
 - This will vary based on age (a young child may show behavioral issues but an older child may isolate or engage in risky behaviors).
- Look for outbursts, tantrums, change in sleep, clinginess, change in appetite, regression (a child that was toilet trained is having accidents).

GETTING HELP:

- Keep the structure and routine.
- Find outlets. Meditate together, go for walks, color or draw.
- Make space for conversations and check in (remember, do not push for them to talk, but remind them you are there).
- Reach out to your child's doctor, a therapist or mental health professional.
- Call your EAP for assistance.
- Search for books or videos that are age appropriate to talk about trauma.



If you or a child in your life are struggling to cope with recent traumatic events, reach out to your Assistance Program for help and resources.

Visit allonehealth.com/member-support