

Coping with Tragic Events

Tragic events students and their families may experience are car accidents, fire, or natural disaster.

Common reactions that children may experience after a tragic event can include worrying about their own safety, the safety of family members, and worrying the disaster will happen again.

In school, the student might experience difficulty concentrating, withdrawal from peers or activities, increased irritability, anger outbursts or temper tantrums, or changes in academic performance.

Helpful Tips

- Make your child feel safe. Remind students that major disasters, crises, and emergencies are rare and discuss previous times when they have felt safe. Reinforce safeguards and security measures that are in place at home, their school, and in the community.
- Act calm. Children look to adults for reassurance after traumatic events have occurred. Do not discuss your anxieties with your children, or when they are around, and be aware of the tone of your voice, as children quickly pick up on anxiety.
- Share information about what happened. It's always best to learn the details of a traumatic event from a safe, trusted adult. Be brief and honest, and allow your teen to ask questions should they have any.
- Maintaining routine is encouraged. A sense of consistency will help the student feel safe.
- Take a break from the crisis and try to limit exposure to media that may show disturbing scenes of what happened.
- Children often process trauma by retelling the same story over and over, so you may find your child repeatedly talking about their disaster experience.
- Build on your child's strengths. Find ways to help them use what they have learned in the past to help them deal with the event.
- Acknowledge what your child is feeling. If a child admits to a concern, do not respond, "Oh, don't be worried," because they may feel embarrassed or criticized. Simply confirm what you are hearing: "Yes, I can see that you are worried."
- Know that it's okay to answer, "I don't know." What your child will need most is someone whom they trust to listen to their questions, accept their feelings, and be there for them. Don't worry about knowing exactly the right thing to say — after all, there is no answer that will make everything okay.

Adapted from: www.schoolcrisiscenter.org;
<https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-after-a-traumatic-event/>



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