

Coping with Tragedy

For Children of All Ages

Children need answers to three fundamental questions:

1. **Am I safe?**
2. **Are you, the people who take care of me, safe?**
3. **How will these events affect my daily life?**

Parents should expect to answer these questions over and over again. For those with toddlers and preschool children who may not yet be able to express their concerns in words, it's still important to reassure them that everyone is safe, and that life will continue in a normal fashion.

- Keep as normal a routine as possible to demonstrate that life is secure despite the event that happened.
- Share your feelings with your children and ask them to share their feelings with you. Let them know that it's OK to be frightened, sad, or angry; it's all part of being human. Tell them that event is over and that they are safe.
- Children may have ideas and beliefs that are difficult to know unless you ask them what they have heard and what they have questions about. While you should try to answer your children's questions at a level they can understand, remember that you may not have an immediate answer for everything. Some questions simply don't have good answers.

- Some kids may act out their distress by acting out or becoming very quiet. Difficult emotions can cause difficult behaviour. Try to stay calm and show understanding, avoid punishing them for their reactions but you can still set limits on behaviours that are not okay. Let them know that talking may help and that you are there for them.
- Remember that **relationships with family** and close friends are crucial; they are the foundation of your children's world.

Most children will be able to cope with the support and understanding of their parents, teachers, coaches, and community members. However, some may have more difficulties that are continuing and may need further help from a school counselor or other mental health provider. Please reach out for help if needed.

Adapted from the Clay Centre (mghclaycentre.org), the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (nctsn.org), and the Centre for the Study of Traumatic Stress (cstsonline.org)