



Supporting Children and Teens Following a Tragic Event

Recommendations for Parents and Educators

A tragic event, such as a high-profile act of violence, may leave children and youth feeling confused and frightened. Often, they will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school supports can help children and youth to feel protected and safe at school, as well as to help them establish a sense of normalcy and security moving forward.

The following tips may be helpful for educators and parents in the days following a tragic event:

- **Do your best to remain calm and in control of your emotions and actions.** Children and youth are counting on adults to guide and help them with their reactions.
- **Check in and listen.** Where developmentally appropriate, it is ok to ask children and youth what they know about an event, what they are thinking or feeling, and whether they have any questions.
- **It is ok to let children and youth know how you are feeling, but it is important to follow this up with a hopeful message.** Let them know that overall, there is safety in our community, as well as strength in our families and school community to overcome tragic events.
- **Reassure children and youth that they are safe.** Support them to talk about their feelings, help them to express their feelings appropriately, and validate what they are experiencing.
- **Try to limit the amount of media coverage that children and teens see.** Watching events replayed on television or through social media can be overwhelming, particularly for students that may be prone to worrying.
- **Maintain a normal routine whenever possible.** Predictability is comforting for children, and helps them to feel more secure.
- **Pay special attention to children that may have suffered from trauma or loss previously, or who may struggle with anxiety or mood-related symptoms.** Remember that some children may not express their concerns or worry verbally. Monitor the behaviour of children and youth for signs of distress – this may include difficulties sleeping, or a change in mood, behaviour, or appetite.
- **If you are concerned about your child or youth, please reach out to their teacher or school Administrator to explore additional supports that may be available.**

Suggestions for Sharing Age Appropriate Information with Children and Youth

It is important to keep your explanations developmentally appropriate, and that information provided is factual and clear. Try not to provide more detail than the child or youth is requesting or ready to hear.

- **Primary aged students** need brief, simple information, along with reassurance that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them.
- **Intermediate aged students** may ask more questions about their safety and what is being done at school to keep them safe. Discuss specific steps that schools take to ensure safety.
- **High school students** may have strong and varying opinions about violence in schools and in society in general. Emphasize the importance that all have in maintaining safe schools.