Information for Parents/Caregivers
Responding to Children and Young People after a Crisis

After a crisis event parent/caregivers often ask:
- What can be regarded as ‘normal’ reactions for children and young people?
- How should we respond to our children in the period after the crisis event?
- How should we answer the questions that arise?

Each child’s and young person’s response will be unique and a wide range of reactions are possible.
Their reaction will depend upon their personality, how mature they are, their past experience, what is happening in their life now and their ability to adjust to change. Your child, whatever age, needs to find safe ways to express their feelings. They may feel anger, anxiety, aggression, withdrawal, fear, and sadness.

Children and young people may have many questions.
They may want to know exactly what happened. Often rumours or what they imagined happened, can be much worse than the facts. It is best to give accurate details and correct any wrong information. Adults sometimes think that keeping information from children about what is happening will make them feel better. Not having correct information may make them feel anxious and confused.

Having a Plan
Talking with your child about a personal plan or seeking advice about how to do this could be very worthwhile and help them feel they have some control over their worries. See additional information attached.

Often children and young people feel very anxious about crisis situations. They may go back to acting in ways they did when they were much younger e.g. not wanting to sleep alone and wanting go be taken places when they previously felt safe to go alone. Unusual behaviour often shows your son or daughter feels anxious. They need support and reassurance to feel safe again.

Children and young people need plenty of understanding, reassurance and attention from adults, at a time of crisis. They need to be allowed to express their reaction (e.g. grief, anger and frustration) in safe ways. Children and young people need time to discuss how they feel or may find expressing through writing or poetry useful.

Maintain a ‘normal’ routine as much as possible. Children and young people may test out the boundaries of good behaviour, to see if rules still apply. Providing limits, with some flexibility due to the circumstances, can increase their feeling of safety.

Children and young people who have experienced other concerns or losses in their lives may find it harder to cope with a crisis (e.g. separation/divorce of parents, death of a relative or pet, moving house/school). They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even though they may have appeared to be coping before the crisis event.

If you are concerned about your son’s or daughter’s reactions it is important to speak to their teacher, principal or student counsellor at school. Sometimes it is important to get counselling or support from community agencies. (See contacts below).
Be aware that you or your children may be affected by media responses to the event. You may decide to limit television viewing, or watch TV/news coverage together so that you can discuss any reactions or concerns and ensure your child feels supported.

LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD...ALLOW EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS
REASSURE YOUR CHILD, GIVE EXTRA ATTENTION AND HUGS
SUPPORT YOUR CHILD WITH TAKING CHARGE OF SMALL DECISIONS
RE-ESTABLISH NORMAL LIVING
SEEK SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF

Be aware that school staff will also be affected and require understanding and support. Some may appear tired and may be experiencing unusual feelings and reactions.

You may also find you have a reaction to the crisis even if you are not directly affected. This is normal. It is useful to talk to someone you trust about what is happening to you, or to get counselling for yourself.

REFERRAL SERVICES

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<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifeline</td>
<td>13 11 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>KIDS HELPLINE</td>
<td>1800 55 1800</td>
<td><a href="http://www.kidshelp.com.au">www.kidshelp.com.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>PARENT HELPLINE</td>
<td>1300 364 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beyondblue</td>
<td>1300 22 4636</td>
<td><a href="http://www.beyondblue.org.au">www.beyondblue.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>eHeadspace</td>
<td>1800 650 890</td>
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<td>REACH OUT</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.reachout.com">www.reachout.com</a></td>
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<td>Local GP</td>
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<td>Local Community Health Centre</td>
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Websites about recovering from a crisis or natural disaster

www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/trauma_looking_after_yourself.html