

Guidance to Parents on Supporting Children at Time of Crisis

Children may react to crisis events differently, depending on the degree of exposure, level of emotional/cognitive development, parental response and their personal experiences. Below are some common reactions associated with children who have encountered a crisis event and some ideas about how parents can help.

COMMON CRISIS REACTIONS

- Physiological reactions – headaches, stomachaches, muscle tremors, fatigue, sweating, sleep/appetite disturbance
- Emotional reactions – shock, denial, fear, sadness, anxiety
- Behavioral reactions – restlessness, disorganization, rebellious at home/school, loss of interest in peer and social activities
- School performance – fighting, withdrawal, attention-seeking, poor concentration

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Stay calm and stabilize your own emotion.
- Avoid spreading rumors. Provide crisis facts and be selective of appropriate information in the news reports for sharing with your child.
- Let your child feel accepted and supported. Respect his or her feelings. They are genuine even if they are different from yours. Never deny or mock a child's fears and worries.
- Listen to your child's concerns and needs. Do not forbid the child to mention or talk about the incident. Suppressing feelings may have aversive effects in the long run.
- Offer opportunities for your child to share what he or she fears and worries most. Discuss arrangements that will make him or her feel more secure, e.g. keeping him or her company, letting him or her go to bed with the light on, etc.
- Encourage your child to express their feelings in different means, such as storytelling, drawing and doing crafts.
- Do express words of comfort but do not be anxious to give advice. Excessive concern can result in undue stress.
- Encourage your child to continue with normal routines as far as possible.
- Arrange activities that are good for the body and mind, such as listening to music, doing sports and, helping to relax, encourage your child to focus on other matters.
- Observe and monitor your child's progress. Refer him or her to the teachers or school guidance personnel for follow-up support if necessary

Reference

Education Bureau. (2016). School Crisis Management Intervention and Psychological Support in the Aftermath of Crises Handbook. https://crc.edb.gov.hk/crhome/edbpublication/EDB_School-crisis-managementintervention-and-psychological-support-in-the-aftermath-of-crises-handbook_eng-2016.pdf