

10 ways parents and caregivers can support children in the short term following a disaster or community trauma

Supporting your children in the weeks and months after a disaster or traumatic event can feel daunting, but there are some basic steps you can take to help support their recovery and protect them from having ongoing difficulties.

1. Listen and attend to your children carefully.

Speak to your children regularly about how they are feeling after the event. Check in with them over time and remember that frequent, shorter conversations are often more supportive than one-off chats.

2. Give children reassurance.

Let them know it is normal to still feel upset after such a big event and that you are there to help them through this. Normalise their feelings of distress and give them the time they need.

3. Continue to be on the lookout for changes in behaviour.

As the weeks go past, initial distress will begin to pass; however, if things aren't getting better it is important to seek extra support for you and your child.

4. Model the skills you want to see in your child.

Share with them how you are coping and what has helped. Be honest about how it is hard for you too, but with supports and time things will get easier.

5. Understand each child's unique needs.

Everyone experiences distressing events differently, including children within the same family. Talk about this together, focusing both on hard times and what is helping. Children can learn from this and see that it's okay to feel differently than others and to recover in their own way.

6. Give your children extra time and attention.

This can be difficult when families are recovering and demands on adults are high; nevertheless, children



need close personal attention to know they are safe. It doesn't have to be elaborate or lengthy - the important thing is children feel connected to you and you can find time for them.

7. Don't expect perfection in yourself or your children.

If things have gone badly, you've lost your temper or broken down that is okay. Speak with your children afterwards, apologise if necessary and reassure them that they are still safe and loved.

8. Help your children return to a normal routine.

It can be tempting to allow normal rules to slip, but children do best when things are predictable, clear boundaries are set and followed, and they know what to expect.

9. Take time to look after yourself.

This is not an indulgence, but a priority. Our children are not okay if we are not okay.

10. Support children to re-establish their social connections.

At first, children can feel unsure about being away from you, or worry about what to say if friends ask them about what happened. Role play with your children ways to answer questions that help them feel okay and safe, and rehearse ways to seek help with their emotions. Put a plan in place and start with shorter play dates. Let your children know that you want them to spend time with their friends.

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