



CRISIS AFTERCARE

A GUIDE TO ASSIST THE OAK HILLS *ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS*
COMMUNITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF A CRISIS



6325 Rapid Run Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45233



CRISIS AFTERCARE

OAK HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT SAFETY PLAN

Each Oak Hills Elementary School has in place the “Oak Hills Schools Safety Plan” to direct the activities in the building during a crisis or safety situation (example: accident with student/staff, assault on student/staff, terrorism/hostage/sniper, tornado, fire or explosion, utility emergencies, etc.). This plan is to be posted in each classroom and throughout the building. Each Oak Hills Elementary School has identified a number of staff members who will assist in carrying out the “Oak Hills Schools Safety Plan” in the case of a crisis. In addition to the district plan, each Oak Hills Elementary School has developed additional mental health interventions and strategies to help the staff and students in the aftermath of a crisis.

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Introduction

Crisis or traumatic events occur in everyone's life. A crisis may be the direct result of one's behavior choices (i.e. drug overdose) or may be the result of situations outside of one's immediate control (i.e. terminal illness). Regardless of the situation, individuals vary in their ability to cope with the acute stress and confusion brought about by a crisis or traumatic event. Children, as a result of their relatively limited amount of life experience, often encounter great difficulty coping with a traumatic event. Because of their own personal issues, some adults may not always be able to provide needed assistance to students. Crises often result in confusion and heightened emotion, which has the potential for unsound decision making.

Although we recognize that individual crises are encountered on a daily basis by students and staff, the current "aftercare plan" is designed to deal with situations which hold the potential to affect significant numbers of our school population.

Examples of crisis situations include:

- accidental death of a student
- accidental death of a staff member
- suicide by a student
- suicide by a staff member
- student death from illness
- staff death from illness
- natural disaster such as a tornado

- man-made disaster such as a toxic chemical spill
- terrorist intrusion to the school or community

Methods of Response

There are three methods of responding to the aftermath of a crisis in the Oak Hills Local School District. Each method increases in intensity depending on the severity of the mental health needs of the student and staff population during and after the crisis. This guide focuses primarily on the first method, the “In-House Aftercare Response Team”.



In-House Aftercare Response Team-

The in-house team typically responds to most of the mental health needs of the student population during the school year. The in-house team delivers on-site counseling and supports to the building after a crisis and assesses additional needs with the building administration.

District Aftercare Response Team-

The district team provides in-house teams with additional support, coordinates district responses, and organizes professional development for district staff.

Regional Crisis Aftercare Resource Group-

The regional group provides a forum for inter-district, community, and agency sharing of ideas and support.



Oak Hills Local School District Elementary Schools

C.O. Harrison Elementary

585 Neeb Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45238

Phone: (513) 922-1485

School Hours: 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

School Principal: Corey Kessler

Assistant Principal: Kristi Bashara

Delshire Elementary

4402 Glenhaven Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45238

Phone: (513) 471-1766

School Hours: 8:45 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.

School Principal: Travis Hunt

J.F. Dulles Elementary

6481 Bridgetown Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45248

Phone: (513) 574-3443

School Hours: 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

School Principal: Scott Toon

Assistant Principal: Elizabeth Riesenberger

Oakdale Elementary

3850 Virginia Court, Cincinnati, Ohio 45211

Phone: (513) 574-1100

School Hours: 8:45 a.m. – 3:10 p.m.

School Principal: Geoffrey Harold

Assistant Principal: Tom Melvin

Springmyer Elementary

4179 Ebenezer Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45248

Phone: (513) 574-1205

School Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

School Principal: Alyssa Adkins





In-House Aftercare Response Team

Team Members Phone Chain

	Home	Cell	Text
CO Harrison			
Corey Kessler - Principal	513-248-2072	513-259-1919	Y
Kristi Bashara - Asst. Principal	513-598-5736	513-543-0434	Y
Keri Bennett - Psychologist	See cell number.	740-352-7069	Y
Candice Lessing - Psychologist	See cell number.	513-828-9834	Y
Officer Bill Murphy - SRO	See cell numbers.	513-379-1897 (during day) 513-608-7734 (after hours)	Y
Debbie Ellis - Secretary	513-451-2696	513-673-8549	Y
Jan Collini - Secretary	513-451-8292	513-708-4825	N
Mary Erwin - Nurse	513-574-3292	513-417-7860	Y
Amy Withrow - Nurse	See cell number.	513-417-9162	Y
Delshire			
Mr. Hunt - Principal		513-314-9358	Y
Chelsey Schneider Sch Psych		859-380-1537	Y
Mary Knuth Sch Psych		513-607-3800	Y
Judy Weberding Counselor		513-503-7671	Y
Kara Hester Secretary			Y
Cindy Anderson Secretary		513-827-0479	Y
Jennifer Schwarz (Nurse)		513-919-1948	Y
Officer Bill Murphy		513-379-1897 (during day) 513-608-7734 (after hour)	Y
Dulles			
Scott Toon (Principal)	513-257-5373	513-257-5373	Y
Beth Riesenberger (Asst. Principal)			
Amy Wilford (School Psychologist)	513-759-7453	513-659-6504	Y
Staci Sabato (School Counselor)			
Oakdale			
Geoffrey Harold (Principal)	513-518-7101	513-518-7101	Y
Tom Melvin (Asst. Principal)	510-4020	473-3682	Y
Amy Grayson (School Psychologist)	Same as cell number	513-288-7204	Y
Julia Lawhead (School Psychologist)	513-598-6028	513-313-0935	Y

Christy Glenn (School Nurse)	513-574-8433	513-236-4093	Y
Springmyer			
Tom Melvin (Principal)	513-741-4098	513-473-3682	
Kristi Bashara (Asst. Principal)	513-598-5736	513-543-0434	Y
Michelle Ellis (School Psychologist)	Same as cell number	513-748-1171	Y
Jan Bedel (School Nurse)	513-574-6681	513-348-8133	

In-House Aftercare Response Team

There are several reasons for having an “In-House Aftercare Response Team” at each Oak Hills Elementary School:

- An in-house team is more aware of the building climate, specific student issues, and the school and community norms and expectations.
- An in-house team can spread the responsibility for management of the interventions across a number of individuals.
- An in-house team supports the building administration instead of placing total responsibility on the building administrator to work with an outside team.
- An in-house team knows the students and staff. Students are more likely to relate to a school counselor, school psychologist, or teacher who they see in the school on a regular basis, as opposed to an outside mental health professional.
- An in-house team is better able to “catch” a crisis in the early stages, which may prevent further disruption to the lives of both students and staff.
- An in-house team promotes security and confidence among staff by knowing a mental health aftercare plan is in place.
- An in-house team is better able to follow up in the days and weeks following the event.





In-House Aftercare Response Team

C.O. Harrison Elementary

- Building Principal – Corey Kessler
- Building Assistant Principal – Kristi Bashara
- Building School Psychologist – Keri Bennett and Candice Lessing
- Building Health Room Staff – Mary Erwin and Amy Withrow
- School Resource Officer – Officer Bill Murphy
- Building Secretary – Debbie Ellis and Jan Collini
- Teacher Team – Designated Teachers as Necessary

Delshire Elementary

- Building Principal – Travis Hunt
- Counselor - Judy Weberding
- Building School Psychologists – Chelsey Schneider & Mary Knuth
- Building Secretaries - Cara Hester & Cindy Anderson
- Building Nurse – Jennifer Schwarz
- School Resource Officer – Officer Bill Murphy
- CORE Leaders – Designated Teachers as Necessary

J. F. Dulles Elementary

- Building Principal – Scott Toon
- Building Assistant Principal – Elizabeth Riesenberger
- Building School Psychologist – Amy Wilford
- Building Counselor – Staci Sabato

Oakdale Elementary

- Building Principal –
- Building Assistant Principal –
- Building School Psychologist – Amy Grayson and Julia Lawhead
- Building Nurse – Christine Glenn

Springmyer Elementary

- Building Principal – Alyssa Adkins
- Building Assistant Principal –
- Building School Psychologist – Michelle Ellis
- Building Nurse – Jan Bedel

Reporting an Event

- A staff member must immediately report to the building principal, or designee, any crisis situation according to the “Oak Hills Schools Safety Plan”. Included as a crisis would be the death of a student, staff member, or community member whose death affects a portion of the school population. Overall, situations that involve the emotional well-being of a group of students should be reported to the principal for evaluation.
- The building administrator, possibly in consultation with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Operations, must decide upon the seriousness of the report. They collaboratively decide which staff members need to be notified and what method of response is initially needed.
- Responses as needs intensify:
 - The building administration contacts the “In-house Aftercare Response Team” for debriefing and planning.
 - The building principal will contact other principals in the district in order that they might initiate any responses from the situation in their buildings.
 - A member of the in-house team contacts the Coordinator for Intervention Services in order to initiate the response of the “District Aftercare Response Team”.
 - The Communication Coordinator will serve as the spokesperson for the media.
 - The Assistant Superintendent of Operations contacts the Regional Crisis Aftercare Resource Group for additional supports.

Aftercare Team Checklist

- Principal notifies Superintendent
- Principal notifies other district principals
- Principal notifies members of the aftercare team and schedules a before-school meeting for team members
- Principal starts emergency phone tree to notify certified and non-certified staff of MANDATORY staff meeting

Note: Some of the activities listed below may need to occur throughout the day as the time and need arises.

The Aftercare Team Checklist is to be reviewed at the before-school meeting. Not all steps need to be completed but should be considered.

- Aftercare team meets prior to staff meeting:
 - Collect information and develop fact sheet about the specific situation
 - Determine method of student body notification. Compose a statement.
 - Determine location for aftercare student counseling. Determine back up rooms in case of need.
 - Determine staffing of aftercare response center/room.
 - Determine extra duties for non aftercare team members: i.e., hall duty, restroom monitoring (i.e. house secretaries to assist with “other” duties).
 - Determine need for “District Aftercare Response Team”
 - Prepare information for staff concerning signs of grief, PTSD, how to respond to students in the class, etc. (Pre-planned handouts)

- Identify staff that may need support. Possibly adjust workload.
- Schedule meeting with teachers that may be most affected.
- Determine need to notify area private schools and churches. Assign responsibilities for any notifications
- Reschedule extracurricular activities as needed.

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Aftercare Team Checklist (page 2)

- Develop and coordinate information sent home. Include:
 - What has happened
 - What students have been told
 - In the event of a death, funeral arrangements if known
 - Emotional responses parents may observe in children
 - Suggestion on how to help their children
 - Resources

- In case of death:
 - Principal will contact and maintain contact with family
 - Take charge of personal items from locker
 - Who will follow student or teacher schedule
 - Determine whether a school memorial service should take place

- Conduct before school staff meeting:
 - Provide facts and distribute fact sheet
 - Location of response center(s)
 - Method for getting students to aftercare counseling
 - Additional staff duties

Teacher/staff needs

After school meeting – Aftercare Team

Review the day

Plans for rest of the week

End of Day Briefing

Purpose: Aftercare team and staff can get together to share experiences of the day in a safe, private setting.

Suggestions for debriefing:

- Those actively involved in the day's events are encouraged to attend
- No outsiders, such as parents, media
- Staff are encouraged to share the day's experiences
- Staff are encouraged to share feelings about the day
- Staff are encouraged to ask questions
- Staff are encouraged to take care of themselves
- Staff are encouraged to maintain confidentiality

Aftercare Team: Student Assistance

- Clear daily schedule of all activities
- Coordinate and implement aftercare counseling center
- Assemble materials: i.e., tissues, paper, news print and other art supplies
- Notify close friends privately
- Be available to assist teachers in classroom
- Provide teachers with resource packets for their classes
- Identify students who may be at risk
- Maintain a list of all students seen for counseling
- Contact parents of students who appear in significant distress
- Maintain list of students who may require follow up contact
- Maintain confidentiality
- Recognize personal limitations and seek help when needed
- Be sensitive to religious and/or cultural differences in dealing with the situation

When Additional Assistance is Needed: Assisting Other Mental Health Professionals

If additional assistance is needed, district personnel would be the first responders:

Counselors and school psychologist from OHHS feeder schools and other district schools

- Introduce to administration, counseling department, members of aftercare team providing direct student support and building secretaries
- Provide with building visitor passes
- Brief summary of event – written summary
- Brief summary of what has already taken place at building level to respond to the situation
- Map of building: aftercare counseling location
- Availability of phones
- Availability of coffee, soda, snacks, lunch
- Arrange for breaks
- Inform them of method to keep track of all students seen in counseling
- Debriefing prior to their departure
- Consider having house secretary help with this

Suggestions for Staff

- Announce situation to class as directed by administration.
- Recognize that your day may not be typical. Be flexible.
- Postpone tests, major assignments, or tasks that require concentration.
- Be honest in your communication.
- Use vocabulary that is developmentally appropriate.
- Share a calm demeanor to help your students with their emotions.
- Ask, “Does anyone need to talk about...”
- In case of death, possibly talk about memories
- In case of death, discuss what to do with the empty desk.
- If case of a death, discuss within your comfort level.
- Do not allow disrespectful or inappropriate comments.
- Let students know there is a more private place to go if they need to leave class.
- Escort upset students to the aftercare counseling center. Call for help if you need an escort.
- Emphasize the facts as you know them. Stop rumors, do not speculate.
- Notify counselors of any students with whom you have specific concerns.
- Recognize your own needs. If you need assistance, or time, ask.

NOTE: Some students may not display signs of stress until days or weeks after the event.

Second Day Procedures

Depending on the nature of the event, and the response of the students and staff, the following should be considered:

1. Hold a brief staff meeting before school begins
2. Update staff on developments
3. Announce procedures for any additional student counseling
4. Address any specific staff questions or concerns
5. In the case of a death:
 - a. Provide information concerning funeral arrangements
 - b. Provide procedures for staff who wish to attend services during the school day
 - c. Provide procedures for students who wish to attend services during the school day

Consideration when Dealing with a Suicide

- Close friends need to be told privately.
- When possible, have the student's parents present, thereby providing support and allowing the student to go home.

Be prepared for feelings of:

- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Guilt

High Risk Students:

- Boyfriends or girlfriends
- Close friends and relatives
- Students who know others who have committed suicide
- Students who have recently experienced a death
- Students who are depressed
- Students with weak social supports

Rumors may be more graphic and gruesome than actual events. It is essential that students be told the facts.

Terminal Illness of a Staff or Student

Care should be taken to prepare students for the impending loss of a peer or teacher due to illness.

Suggestions for group discussions can be found in School Crisis Survival Guide, by Peterson and Straub.

Consultation with appropriate agencies such as Fernside, Children's Hospital, or Cancer Family Center should be considered.

Appendix



Crisis Aftercare Log

Date:

Student Name	Aftercare Member	Comments

Aftercare Team Checklist

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 - Who will follow student or teacher schedule
 - Determine whether a school memorial service should take place

- Conduct before school staff meeting:
 - Provide facts and distribute fact sheet
 - Location of response center(s)
 - Method for getting students to aftercare counseling
 - Additional staff duties

- Teacher/staff needs

- After school meeting – Aftercare Team
 - Review the day
 - Plans for rest of the week

Tips for Speaking with your Child about Death

Fernside, Center for Grieving Children, has developed the following list of guidelines to assist children who have experienced a death:

- Be available
- Encourage them to speak openly, share emotions, ask questions
- There is no time limit on the experience of grief

DON'T SAY

- _____ has gone to sleep, but won't wake up

Children need to realize that there is a difference between our typical experience of going to the doctor to get some medicine which heals us, and a serious, terminal medical condition.

DO SAY

- Use the words "died" and "dead." *Do Not* use the phrase "passed away" or "is no longer with us."
- Explain that the death is no one's fault
- Be prepared to repeat your conversation a number of times. Be patient.
- Admit that you do not have all the answers.

FEELINGS

- Grief is normal when someone dies
- Share your own feelings with your child
- A death may trigger feelings of other losses that your child has experienced; i.e. death, divorce, moving, death of a pet, etc.



Parent Guidelines for Assisting Children During Community Concern

Sometimes there are larger events, either on local or even national levels that cause disruption to our typical daily routines. Most children function best when they are feeling secure within the structure of their daily routines. Pre-teens and teenagers, by the nature of their natural development, may experience significant emotional reactions to crisis or traumatic events.

Consider the following in helping them cope:

- As soon as possible after the event, set time to talk with your child. It's better for them to hear the information from you than rumors from the streets.
- Keep the facts simple. Don't go into too much detail.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it.
- Don't speculate.
- Use accurate language: died, kidnapped, is missing, etc.
- Ask questions surrounding feelings: How are you feeling? How are your friends feeling?
- Share your feelings with your child. It's OK for children to see that their parents also experience emotions.
- If you are overwhelmed, get someone else to help you. Try to avoid imparting your panic to your child.
- Keep in mind the age and maturity level of your child. If you have children of vastly different ages, you may need to address the issues somewhat differently.
- Children, regardless of age, often become fearful during a crisis situation. Reassure them of their overall safety. Being in the same room may provide a degree of safety.

Considerations in the Aftermath of a Suicide

(Poland and McCormick, 1999)

- Tell the truth, but provide few or no details about the method.
- Stick to the facts provided by the administrator.
- Do not attempt figure out (or spend time discussing with students) why the person committed suicide.
- If asked, “Why didn’t God stop...” explain that there are many different beliefs and encourage the student to speak with their clergy or parents.
- Do not glorify the student in any way.
- Emphasize that suicide is avoidable – provide assistance in not making a bad choice.
- Do not portray the suicide victim as deviant or mentally ill – again, bad choice
- Do not attempt to make the students feel better by saying “There is nothing anyone could have done to prevent the suicide” because students need to understand that prevention is possible.
- Emphasize that no one except the suicide victim is to blame for his or her actions.
- Focus on prevention (including recognizing warning signs) and emphasize the need to get immediate help for a suicidal person.
- Explain the difference between “telling on” a peer (which is designed to get him or her into trouble) and telling an adult when a peer is talking about suicide (which may save his or her life).
- Emphasize to students that help is available to them both at school and in the community.

Stages of the Grief Reaction

Denial/Shock

- Feeling of numbness
- Insomnia
- Inconsistent behavior
- Persistent nightmares or dreams
- Confusion
- Belief that the deceased will return
- Loss of appetite
- Bargaining with God
- Inability to concentrate

Depression-Typical

- Lethargy
- Frequent crying
- Disinterest in activities
- Increased attention span
- Unkempt appearance
- Suicidal thoughts
- Withdrawal from friends
- Over eating
- Inability to sleep
- Oversleeping
- Loss of appetite

Fear

- Nightmares
- Easily startled
- Phobias
- Sleeplessness
- Anxiety and restlessness

Masking Depression

- Substance abuse
- Sexual acting out
- High risk behavior
- Consistent recklessness
- Inappropriate joking
- "I don't care" attitude

Anger

- Irritability
- Sarcastic remarks
- Vandalism
- Provocative in fights
- Anti-social behavior
- Refusal to comply with rules

Guilt

- Often masked by anger
- Apologetic attitude
- Self destructive behavior
- Acting out response to praise

Reorganization

- Planning for future begins
- Joy and laughter return

School Crisis Survival Guide, Peterson & Straub

Age Level Appropriate Books for Crisis Situations

A Year in the Life of R. Bernard

by Barbara Brenner

Harper Row

Rosie's mother dies and she goes through lots of changes, finds new strength, and new beginnings (ages 7 and up)

Badger's Parting Gifts

by Susan Varley

Lothrop/Lee

A badger dies of old age. His animal friends grieve and remember (ages K-4)

Everett Anderson's Goodbye

by Lucille Clifton

Holt

Everett struggles through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance after his Dad dies (ages 4-9)

Geranium Mornings

by Sandy Powell

Carolrhoda

A boy's dad dies suddenly in an accident, and he feels guilty for not having gone with him. Then he meets a girl whose mom is dying of cancer. Together they talk about their feelings and help each other to feel better (ages 4-12)

Goodbye Chicken Little

by Betsy Byars

Harper Row

Jimmie first lost his dad in a coal mining accident, then sees his uncle die. He feels responsible, but his family celebrates the lives and Jimmie chases away Chicken Little (ages 10-15)

My Brother Joey Died Today

by McLendon & Messner

Simon Schuster

The young girl in this story feels angry and guilty after her brother dies suddenly. She feels better after talking with other kids in a support group (ages 10-14)

Rachel and the Upside Down Heart

by Eileen Douglas

Price Stern

Rachel's father dies and she and her mother move to the city. She draws her feelings and memories (ages 6-12)

When my Dad/Mommy Died

by Janice Hammond

Cranbook

A young child's parent dies, there is a funeral, and he worries, goes through changes, asks questions, and is angry. There are pages to color and talk about (ages 3-10)

With You and Without You

by Ann Martin

Scholastic

Liza's father is very seriously ill and they have to make their last Christmas together a really special one. Then Dad dies, and life is even harder than Liza thought it would be. The family has to move (ages 8 and up)

Winter Holding Spring

by Crescent Dragonwagon McMillian

Sarah and her father try to find some meaning in the death of Sarah's mother. They do things together and talk (ages 7-12)

What to Expect After Trauma

Possible Reactions in elementary school students for teachers and parents

1. Feelings of anxiety, fears, and worries about safety of self and others (more clingy to teacher or parent)
2. Worries about re-occurrence of violence
3. Increased levels of distress (whiny, irritable, more "moody")
4. Changes in behavior:
 - a. Increased activity level
 - b. Decreased concentration and/or attention
 - c. Withdrawal
 - d. Angry outbursts
 - e. Aggression
 - f. Absenteeism
5. Increased somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
6. Changes in school performance
7. Recreating event (e.g., talking repeatedly about it, "playing" the event)
8. Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g., sirens, planes, thunder, backfires, loud noises)
9. Statements and questions about death and dying

At home parents may also see:

1. Changes in sleep
2. Changes in appetite
3. Withdrawal
4. Lack of interest in usual activities
5. Increased negative behaviors (e.g., defiance) or emotions (e.g., sadness, fears, anger, worries)
6. Regression in behaviors (e.g., baby talk, bedwetting, tantrums)
7. Hate or anger statements

What Can I Do to Help?

Guidelines for Elementary School Teachers

- Reinforce ideas of safety and security. This may be needed multiple times, particularly in response to changes, loud sounds, or other events that may remind the students of the tragedy. After any classroom discussion of the event, end the discussion with a focus on their current safety and a calming activity, such as taking deep breaths, working together on an art project, or holding hands and singing a quiet song.
- Maintain a predictable class schedule and rules to provide support and consistency for the children.
- Listen to and tolerate your students retelling of events, as well as playing out the events. Schedule specific times for discussion and play during the school day to allow for opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings about the tragedy; however, set limits on scary or hurtful play.
- Encourage students to talk about confusing feelings, worries, daydreams, and disruptions of concentration by accepting the feelings, listening carefully, and reminding students that these are normal reactions (any of these feelings are okay) following a very scary event. To reinforce safety consider showing the terrorist events on a map of the world or the USA to reinforce how far Oklahoma City is from the events. Information focused on safety will be important. For example, the President of the USA and other "helping people" (e.g., the firefighters, military, police, doctors) are all working together to make us safe (e.g., stopping flights).
- Some students might express hate toward a large group of people. It can be helpful to validate their strong feelings of anger. However, it will be critical to help the students separate thoughts and feelings about the specific people who caused the tragedy from generalizing it to larger groups of people, including their classmates or other people they might know.
- Young children will process the information about the events at unpredictable times

throughout the day. As they try to develop an understanding of what has happened, they may ask questions that may be initially shocking to adults. Try to respond in a calm manner, answering the questions in simple, direct terms and helping the students transition back to their activity.

- Use simple, direct terms to describe what happened. Avoid terms designed to "soften" the information, which inadvertently further confuses children. For example, use the term "died," rather than "went to sleep."

Guidelines for Elementary School Teachers (Continued)

- Students may misunderstand information about the event as they are trying to make sense of what happened. For example, they may blame themselves, believe things happened that did not happen, believe that terrorists are in the school, etc. Gently help students develop a realistic understanding of the event.
- Students may ask the same types of questions repeatedly, which can be confusing and/or frustrating for teachers. Understand that students may need to hear the information multiple times before being able to integrate and understand it. Give the students time to cope with fears.
- Expect some angry outbursts from students. Try to catch students before they "blow up," by taking them aside, and helping them calm down and regain control of their behavior.
- Do classroom activities that will reinforce the message that one person can make a difference to help and heal. Activities can include drawing pictures and sending cards or class projects of collecting pennies or aluminum cans.
- Encourage some distraction times, which would include doing school work that that does not require high levels of new learning, as well as enjoyable activities.
- Expect some brief, temporary declines in the students' school performance.
- Consider reducing homework as the nation heals and the national routine is stabilized (e.g., parents are back to work, no additional threats).
- Provide reassurance to the students that feelings will get smaller and easier to handle

over time.

- Expect and understand students' regression (acting younger) and other difficult behaviors that are not typical of the students.
- Protect students from re-exposure to frightening situations and reminders of trauma. This includes limiting teacher-to-teacher conversations about the events in front of students.
- Maintain communication with other teachers, school personnel, and parents to monitor how the students are coping with the demands of school, home, and community activities.
- Remain aware of your own reactions to students' trauma. It is okay to express emotions to your students, such as "I am feeling sad about what happened." However, if you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, it is important to take care of yourself and seek support from other teachers and staff.

What Can Parents Do to Help?

Guidelines for Parents of Elementary School Students

In addition to the guidelines for teachers of elementary school students (see Teacher Guidelines), the following are ways parents can complement what is being provided in the schools:

- Avoid exposing your child to reminders of the trauma. This includes limiting your child's exposure to the news and other television programs about the tragedy. If you do choose to have your child see this information on the television, keep it brief, watch it with your child, and talk to your child after to clarify miscommunication. Protecting the children from re-exposure includes limiting exposure to adult conversations about the events - even when you think they are not listening, they often are.
- Maintain the family routines, particularly around sleeping, eating, and extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, church, and dance). Be sure the bedtime routine includes safely tucking them in at night. Young children may want a night light again. Make sure your child is receiving a balanced diet and enough rest.
- Avoid unnecessary separations from important caregivers.
- Expect temporary regression in your child's behaviors (e.g., starting to babytalk, wetting the bed). Do not panic, as your child is likely to return to previous functioning with time and support.
- Provide soothing activities, such as reading books, listening to music, taking a walk, riding bikes, etc.
- Increase patience with your child and with yourself. Give your family time to cope. Find ways to emphasize to the children that you love them.



Helping Children Cope with National Tragedy

Tips for Parents and Teachers

Whenever a national tragedy occurs, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, children, like many people, may be confused or frightened. Most likely they will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children cope first and foremost by establishing a sense of safety and security. As more information becomes available, adults can continue to help children work through their emotions and perhaps even use the process as a learning experience.

All Adults Should:

- 1. Model calm and control.** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid appearing anxious or frightened.
- 2. Reassure children that they are safe** and (if true) so are the other important adults in their lives. Depending on the situation, point out factors that help insure their immediate safety and that of their community.
- 3. Remind them that trustworthy people are in charge.** Explain that the government emergency workers, police, firefighters, doctors, and the military are helping people who are hurt and are working to ensure that no further tragedies occur.
- 4. Let children know that it is okay to feel upset.** Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy like this occurs. Let children talk about their feelings and help put them into perspective. Even anger is okay, but children may need help and patience from adults to assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
- 5. Observe children's emotional state.** Depending on their age, children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of grief, anxiety or discomfort. Children will express their emotions differently. There is no right or wrong way to feel or express grief.
- 6. Look for children at greater risk.** Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Be particularly observant for those who may be at risk of suicide. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.

7. **Tell children the truth.** Don't try to pretend the event has not occurred or that it is not serious. Children are smart. They will be more worried if they think you are too afraid to tell them what is happening.
8. **Stick to the facts.** Don't embellish or speculate about what has happened and what might happen. Don't dwell on the scale or scope of the tragedy, particularly with young children.
9. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.** *Early elementary school* children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that the daily structures of their lives will not change. *Upper elementary and early middle school* children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. *Upper middle school and high school* students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence and threats to safety in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. They will be more committed to doing something to help the victims and affected community. ***For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!***
10. **Monitor your own stress level.** Don't ignore your own feelings of anxiety, grief, and anger. Talking to friends, family members, religious leaders, and mental health counselors can help. It is okay to let your children know that you are sad, but that you believe things will get better. You will be better able to support your children if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner. Get appropriate sleep, nutrition, and exercise.

What Parents Can Do:

1. **Focus on your children over the week following the tragedy.** Tell them you love them and everything will be okay. Try to help them understand what has happened, keeping in mind their developmental level.
2. **Make time to talk with your children.** Remember if you do not talk to your children about this incident someone else will. Take some time and determine what you wish to say.
3. **Stay close to your children.** Your physical presence will reassure them and give you the opportunity to monitor their reaction. Many children will want actual physical contact. Give plenty of hugs. Let them sit close to you, and make sure to take extra time at bedtime to cuddle and to reassure them that they are loved and safe.
4. **Limit your child's television viewing of these events.** If they must watch, watch with them for a brief time; then turn the set off. Don't sit mesmerized re-watching the same events over and over again.

5. **Maintain a “normal” routine.** To the extent possible stick to your family’s normal routine for dinner, homework, chores, bedtime, etc., *but don’t be inflexible*. Children may have a hard time concentrating on schoolwork or falling asleep at night.
6. **Spend extra time reading or playing quiet games with your children before bed.** These activities are calming, foster a sense of closeness and security, and reinforce a sense of normalcy. Spend more time tucking them in. Let them sleep with a light on if they ask for it.
7. **Safeguard your children’s physical health.** Stress can take a physical toll on children as well as adults. Make sure your children get appropriate sleep, exercise, and nutrition.
8. **Consider praying or thinking hopeful thoughts for the victims and their families.** It may be a good time to take your children to your place of worship, write a poem, or draw a picture to help your child express their feelings and feel that they are somehow supporting the victims and their families.
9. **Find out what resources your school has in place to help children cope.** Most schools are likely to be open and often are a good place for children to regain a sense of normalcy. Being with their friends and teachers can help. Schools should also have a plan for making counseling available to children and adults who need it.

What Schools Can Do:

1. **Assure children that they are safe** and that schools are well prepared to take care of all children at all times.
2. **Maintain structure and stability within the schools.** It would be best, however, not to have tests or major projects within the next few days.
3. **Have a plan for the first few days back at school.** Include school psychologists, counselors, and crisis team members in planning the school’s response.
4. **Provide teachers and parents with information** about what to say and do for children in school and at home.
5. **Have teachers provide information directly to their students,** not during the public address announcements.
6. **Have school psychologists and counselors available** to talk to students and staff who may need or want extra support.

7. **Be aware of students who may have recently experienced a personal tragedy** or a have personal connection to victims or their families. Even a child who has merely visited the affected area or community may have a strong reaction. Provide these students extra support and leniency if necessary.
8. **Know what community resources are available** for children who may need extra counseling. School psychologists can be very helpful in directing families to the right community resources.
9. **Allow time for age appropriate classroom discussion and activities.** Do not expect teachers to provide all of the answers. They should ask questions and guide the discussion, but not dominate it. Other activities can include art and writing projects, play acting, and physical games.
10. **Be careful not to stereotype people or countries that might be associated with the tragedy.** Children can easily generalize negative statements and develop prejudice. Talk about tolerance and justice versus vengeance. *Stop any bullying or teasing of students immediately.*
11. **Refer children who exhibit extreme anxiety, fear or anger to mental health counselors** in the school. Inform their parents.
12. **Provide an outlet for students' desire to help.** Consider making get well cards or sending letters to the families and survivors of the tragedy, or writing thank you letters to doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals as well as emergency rescue workers, firefighters and police.
13. **Monitor or restrict viewing** scenes of the event as well as the aftermath.

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