

Considerations Following a Loss and/or Traumatic Event

There are no right or wrong ways to talk with your children about difficult topics—every family will find the words that feel right to them. Navigating difficult discussions with compassion for both your child and yourself is essential.

Here are some ways to support your child during traumatic events and respond to conversations they may bring up:

- **Acknowledge and accept** that the event may cause an emotional reaction in both you and your child(ren). Recognizing your own emotions will help you be more supportive of others.
- **Understand that grief and trauma can be expressed in different ways.** Some responses may be triggered from past losses.
- **You don't have to have all the answers.** The most important thing you can offer is your willingness to be present and listen.

When talking to children and youth:

- **LISTEN** – Pay attention to what they are saying.
- **OBSERVE** – Reflect on what you notice (e.g., “It looks to me like...”).
- **VALIDATE** – Acknowledge their feelings (e.g., “It makes sense that you feel/think that.”).
- **RESPECT** – Share your perspective with empathy. (e.g., “If that happened to me, I might feel/think...”).

Additional ways to support children and youth:

- **Encourage open conversations.** Talking about the event can help your child process what happened. Support them in speaking with friends, family members, Elders, or other trusted community members.
- **Stick to facts and avoid speculation.** This helps children feel more secure and grounded.
- **Provide creative outlets.** Encourage children to express themselves through pictures, writing and alternative activities as needed.
- **Support action.** Some children may feel like they need to “do something.” Explore opportunities for them to help, such as volunteering, making cards or writing letters.
- **Respect individual actions.** Try not to be critical of your own or others’ responses, even if they differ from what you might expect. Traumatic events can trigger past experiences and bring up a range of emotions.
- **Offer realistic reassurance.** Help your child feel safe without making unrealistic promises.
- **Don't take things personally.** Your child may express anger or frustration as they process their emotions.
- **Avoid minimizing their experience.** Phrases like, “You're lucky it wasn't worse” or by giving unrealistic advice can make children feel unheard.

Examples of prompts and responses when talking with youth following traumatic events:

- Thank you for sharing how you feel. I'm happy you feel comfortable sharing this with me.
- Have you experienced something like this before? What helped you during that time?
- Let's make a list of the kinds of reactions and feelings people have at times like this.
- What kinds of things have people said or done that were helpful for you/your family?
- How are you feeling about what you've heard? What have you heard?
- Which adults at school do you feel comfortable talking to?
- There is a counsellor at school who helps students with confusing or upsetting situations. Would you like to talk to them?
- This is really confusing. I feel unsure about some of it, too.
- It's okay to feel confused, sad and mad at the same time.
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It's okay to say things like:

- I don't know the answer to that.
- I'm not sure how I feel, but I'm grateful that...
- I'm happy that we had this conversation. Let's focus on _____ now, and if we want to talk about it again, we can.

If you have any questions or would like a school counsellor to check in with or your child, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Take care of yourself, take care of each other.