

How to Cope with Traumatic Incidents (e.g. Infectious Diseases/ Traffic Accidents/ Sudden Deaths/ Terrorist Attacks, etc.)

Suggestions for PARENTS

(Details are in the [eBook on School Crisis Management](#) on EDB website)

A crisis can be precipitated by the suicide of a student or staff, sudden or accidental death, a violent incident, an infectious disease or a natural disaster.

Children exposed to critical incidents experience intense feelings, including anxiety and fear. These feelings are very normal responses and bear therapeutic purposes. Critical incidents may cause different degrees of grief, anger, fear and distress to children and adolescents depending on their cognitive development, past experiences as well as how parents handle their emotional responses. The followings are some common emotional responses of children after having experienced critical incidents and some suggestions for parents on helping children cope with the incidents:

1. Common Emotional Responses

- Sadness
- Anxiety, worry
- Anger, shock
- Feelings of guilt
- Fear of being left alone and separation from the family

2. Behavioural Characteristics of Children Who are Emotionally Distressed

- Regressive behaviour (e.g. bed wetting, clinging, and nightmares etc.)
- Unusual complaints of illness
- Deteriorating school performance
- Sudden change of behaviours or habits
- Excessive crying
- Trembling / Stuttering
- Strong attempts to dominate the others
- Emotionally “needy” / Attention seeking
- Sleeplessness
- Restless behaviour
- Concentration difficulty
- Isolation from others
- Resistance to opening up
- No eye contact

3. In Handling Distressed Children

- **DON'Ts**
 - Don't refuse to communicate
 - Don't just pay attention to children's physical needs and ignore the underlying emotions
 - Don't feel resentful towards children whose behavioural reactions to the incident disrupt normal family routine

- **DO's**
 - Do listen attentively to all of the emotions the children express
 - Do show understanding and genuine acceptance towards the emotions of children (e.g. anxiety, fear, grief etc) and assure them that all these are normal responses
 - Do spend more time with the children, especially for the younger ones; younger children need more holding, hugging and care
 - Do encourage children to express their feelings and thoughts about the incident freely
 - Do encourage children who are unable to express their feelings verbally to use other means such as drawing or story-telling to express their own feelings
 - Do try to restore routines as soon as possible
 - Do pay extra attention to any prolonged changes in children's emotions/ behaviours and seek support from school if needed