

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

Suggestions for TEACHERS

(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.

A crisis or critical incident can arouse different degrees of grief, anger, fear and distress to children and adolescents as well as adults. Hence, it is important that teachers should find ways to handle their own emotions and clarify their own perspectives such as by talking to their peers or relatives first. They can then effectively achieve the ultimate goal of helping their students to transform emotions such as grief and fear into constructive behaviours. Teachers could follow the following principles while supporting their students:

1. Be Calm & Emotionally Stable

- Handle your own emotions first to avoid exacerbating the fear and distress of your students
- Avoid criticizing students or being sarcastic when they express their fears
- Be positive in your attitude and acts since teachers are role models of students
- Provide factual information about the incident

2. Listen to & Accept Students' Emotions

(Please also refer to **eBook Appendix 13**)

- Be an active listener
- Encourage students to share their feelings and thoughts as much as they wish to in order to help them relieve their emotions
- Let students know that it is normal to have feelings of sadness, fear, anger, guilt, etc. and have temporary physical symptoms such as loss of appetite and sleeping problem
- Do not force students to be brave, tough and not to cry
- Do not avoid discussing with students about death or pretend that nothing serious has happened
- Do not romanticize or give an inappropriate explanation of death (e.g. saying that the person has fallen asleep or gone to a place far away)

3. Restore a Sense of Security

- Help students understand the nature of the incident and clarify myths and rumors
- Let students know it is very unfortunate that someone died or got hurt but the incident is over and they are safe now
- Be positive and caring in conveying your messages to make your students, especially the very young ones, feel being loved and protected

4. Arrange Age-appropriate Support & Activities for Students

- Kindergarten Students
 - Be aware of their limited vocabulary and inability to manage abstract ideas
 - Use drawing, puppet show, story reading, etc. to help these very young students express themselves
 - Keep the routine schedule to maintain a sense of security and stability with adults' company
- Primary School Students
 - Use simple languages to help them understand
 - Use role play, games, story reading, artwork, writing, etc. as the channels for young students to express themselves
 - Show them that they are understood and loved even though they may display regressive behaviours such as demanding excessive attention, fear of the dark, etc.
 - Relax your regular demands temporarily such as postponing the date for dictation or test
- Secondary School Students
 - Be aware that teenagers may find it hard to express themselves openly
 - Pay extra attention to unusual changes in behaviour and discipline problems (e.g. truancy, self-harming behaviour, isolation from others, drug taking and violent behaviours, etc.) as these could be a reflection of unresolved emotions that require counselling
 - Help broaden students' perspectives through group discussion or debate on topics related to the meaning of life
- Useful activities include:
 - Games / Role Play

For junior students, teachers can make use of games to help them organise what they have observed and experienced in the incident. Toys such as fire-engine, ambulances, trucks, cranes, blocks, stuffed toys, puppets can be used. For older students, puppet shows are very effective to ventilate their emotions.

➤ Telling / Reading stories

Teachers can read stories to help students relieve their emotions and learn appropriate ways of handling fear and sadness. Sample stories for counselling are available on the Hong Kong Education City website (<http://www.hkedcity.net/parent/index.phtml>). Teachers can also arrange a discussion forum for students to discuss about the incident and their thoughts.

➤ Artwork

Students can be encouraged to use artwork to express their views and feelings about the incident. Teachers should avoid giving too much guidance or comments during the process. Students can be encouraged to talk about their artwork and share their feelings and thoughts while teachers can listen to their expressed emotions and respond with empathy and encouragement.

➤ Writing

For senior students, they can write their own short stories about their experience in the incident or letters of condolences to the victims and their families.

➤ Making condolence cards or memory scrapbooks

Teachers can let students (individually or in groups) make cards or memory scrapbooks so that they could transform their emotions into positive actions.

➤ Discussion

To help students express their feelings and guide them to think about the incident from different perspectives, teachers can use pictures and newspaper cuttings with guiding questions to lead a class discussion.

Teachers could share their own feelings, fear and experience in the incident when leading class discussion. This can help students understand that these feelings are normal and they are not alone. Some students might not be willing to express and teacher should not force them to do so.

5. Identify at-risk students and refer them for follow-up support

- Refer at-risk students for counselling services by the school's guidance personnel or for specialist service outside school
- Contact parents to ensure sufficient support from home