

What to Say and How to Help: Talking with Children after Traumatic Events

When awful things happen, we want to give our children something...here are a few ideas:

- Begin by listening. Create a safe, calm space and follow your child's lead.
- Ask open questions such as, "What have you heard?" or "How are you feeling about it?"
- Answer questions honestly and age-appropriately. Avoid graphic details, but do not lie or dismiss their concerns.
- Acknowledge that something scary has happened and reassure them that their feelings are valid.
- Let children know that adults may feel upset too, and that it is okay to talk about emotions.
- Reassure them about their safety at home, at school, and in the community and explain that there are adults whose job it is to keep people safe.
- Limit media exposure, including television, news, and adult conversations on the phone that children may overhear.
- Talk about the helpers, first responders and community members who supported and protected others. Good people will always help.
- Take care of yourself and aim to remain as calm as possible. Children often borrow our calm and regulation.
- Maintain predictable routines, such as regular sleep times, meals, school, and daily activities, as routines help children feel safe.
- Watch for signs of stress, including changes in sleep, withdrawal, or behaviour changes. Access professional help if needed.
- Remember, you do not need to have all the answers; being present, calm, and supportive is what matters most.