

How can we help and support our children and young people when something dreadful has happened?

A guide for parents, carers and teachers

How might your child be feeling?

All those involved in the incident will have been affected in some way, though each person's experiences of the event will be personal and therefore different.

There may be thoughts and feelings unlike any other that may have been experienced before.

This is a **NORMAL** reaction to a very **ABNORMAL** experience and these emotions may last for some time.

This leaflet will help you to know how others have reacted in similar situations and help you to understand what effects this experience can have on thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

After a terrible event, the feelings and emotions that you or your child may be experiencing are a normal reaction to this.

- Confusion/ helplessness
- Fear and sadness
- Anger, guilt and shame
- Changes in behaviour e.g. anger or aggression or withdrawn
- Sleep disturbance, including bad dreams
- Clinginess, including a desire to sleep with parents or fear of separation.
- Hypervigilance e.g. to loud noises
- Difficulty concentrating, especially at school
- Changes in appetite
- Fears for own safety or the safety of family and friends
- Reluctance to talk— either because it is too painful or out of fear of upsetting family or friends.
- Easily upset by everyday events
- Unwillingness to go to school or college

- Try to answer questions as honestly and accurately as you can.
- Maintain familiar routines and structures— these provide a sense of security.
- Be patient and calm, especially with changes in behaviour.
- Give opportunities to talk about feelings and let them know it is ok to cry.
- Do not hide your own feelings. It is ok for others, especially children, to see an adult upset. Explain in simple terms that everyone gets upset by such events.
- Try to treat your child in your usual way. You may wish to be especially protective—this is a natural reaction but in the longer term being over-protective can make a child feel insecure.
- Be ready to listen but do not be upset if your child chooses not to talk. They may express their feelings in other ways e.g. play or in their behaviour.
- Make time for yourself and make sure you have other adults you can talk to.
- Children's reactions to what happened will vary a great deal for a number of reasons. For some, feelings of distress will be short lived as they and the people around them gradually adjust to the incident. For others the reactions may be more severe and long lasting. There will also be those who seem to have adjusted but may struggle later on. Professional help may be required for children and young people who fail to adjust after an appropriate period of time.