

The Role for Caring Adults after a School or Community Tragedy

After a tragic incident in another community or around the country, adults often ask how best to be helpful to their children. These suggestions are offered to help children who may express fears or concerns after such an event.

Listen

Adults should provide opportunity for and encourage children to express their concerns and fears. Listen for misconceptions or inaccurate information, and share *facts*, as developmentally appropriate. Use this opportunity to validate a child's feelings and give extra reassurance, support & encouragement. Schools ARE safe and caring places for children and staff. Reassure children that our schools have measures to protect their safety.

Protect

Adults and schools provide needed structure, stability, and predictability for children. That is why we encourage children to come to school and return to normal routines as soon as they are able. Monitor children's exposure to media coverage to protect them from secondary trauma.

Connect

Check-in with children on a regular basis. Watch for children who may have individual or on-going needs based on past trauma experiences or difficulty coping after a period of time. Connect with families and/or refer to mental health or counseling staff for follow up, as needed.

Model

Adults can demonstrate calm behavior and healthy coping skills. Maintain level emotions and reactions to children, and help them achieve balance.

Teach

Acknowledge the normal reactions to stress, trauma, and grief. Those affected may have difficulty-sleeping, re-experience the event, have up and down emotions, display rigid thinking, exhibit regressive behavior and over-react to little things and/or have difficulty remembering. Teach about healthy coping responses, as needed.

Problem-solve

Help children problem solve how to go to school every day, how to stay in school, and how to do well. Contact your child's school with individual or on-going needs. The school can help you link with needed resources.

If you have additional questions or needs, please contact your child's school or the CSSRC.

Adapted from:

Schreiber, M., Wong, M., and Schonfeld, D. (2006). Listen, Protect, and Connect. Retrieved April 20, 2010 from http://www.read.gov/kids_downloads/PFA_SchoolCrisis.pdf

Wong, M. (2006, September). Bereavement, Loss & Grief. Workshop conducted at the Emergency Response and Crisis Management Grant meeting of the US Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools.

Colorado School Safety Resource Center

Supporting Safe and Positive Colorado Schools

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