

Strategies for parents/guardians to support children through stressful circumstances

Traumatic events can result in a range of responses in children and youth. Children and youth will respond differently to stressors, and the support of parents/guardians during these extraordinary times is crucial. Modelling calmness is the most important behaviour you can exemplify when talking to your child following a traumatic event or upsetting incident.

Some thoughts to keep in mind when having these discussions include:

Be yourself – Demonstrate your natural concern calmly and in your own words.

Be available – Spend time with your child. Attempt to distract your child by reading, walking, playing games, watching a movie, etc.

Listen – Let your child express their thoughts, concerns, feelings, and perceptions in a non-judgmental, emotionally safe environment.

Explain – Talk about what you know in short, truthful statements. Don't be afraid to admit that you do not have all the answers.

Do not speculate.

Provide comfort and reassurance – Physical and verbal comforts are a great support. Convey that “we are safe and have incredible support in our community”.

Maintain routines – As much as possible, attempt to provide normalcy to your child. Humans are creatures of habit and derive comfort from routine.

Maintain healthy habits – Ensure your child eats a balanced diet, gets plenty of exercise and an appropriate amount of sleep.

Develop resiliency – Your child will look to you for reassurance. Do not convey your own feelings of fear or anxiousness, but rather let your child know that they will get through this difficult period.

Monitor media exposure – Do not overexpose your child to media reports, social media, etc., (especially preschool and elementary age children).

Attend to physical signs of stress – Children will often complain of headaches, stomach aches, backaches, etc. Monitor physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, anxiety, sleep disturbance, etc., and determine whether intervention is required.

Seek additional support – When necessary, you may consider accessing your child's school counsellor, family physician and/or a support agency or resource listed below.

Support Agencies and Resources

Phone Support:

Child and Youth Mental Health Services	604-207-2511
Chimo Crisis Line	604-279-7070
Youth in BC Distress Line	604-872-3311
Kids Help Phone	800-668-6868

On-Line Resources:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/>

Provides self-help, peer reviewed and trusted resources on anxiety. Online resources include educational videos on YouTube, information exchange on Facebook, downloadable articles and resources.

<https://foundrybc.ca/>

Helps young people identify and understand the mental distress they may be experiencing and to link them to the skills and strategies they need to manage these problems.

<https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/>

Provides information related to mental health and substance use. The website includes personal stories, self-help resources, and information about getting help now.

<https://keltymentalhealth.ca>

Provides assistance to families across the province navigate the mental health system, listen and offer peer support, and connect those in need to resources and tools.

<http://www.mindhealthbc.ca/>

Provides easy access to information and resources related to mental health and substance use conditions.