

HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH UNSETTLING TIMES

Acts of violence are frightening and upsetting. Children and youth will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Families, caregivers, and school personnel can help children cope first and foremost by establishing a sense of safety and security. Parents and teachers can help children understand what is happening factually, how events do or do not impact their lives, and how to cope with their reactions.

KEEP EXPLANATIONS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE

Early Elementary

Provide brief, simple information with reassurance.

Upper Elementary

Answer questions and assist in separating reality from fantasy.

Middle and High School

Validate opinions, and provide the facts needed to appraise the degree of personal threat.



REAFFIRM SAFETY

- Reassure children that they are safe, their schools are safe, and (if true) so are the adults in their lives.
- If appropriate, share how the chance of being personally affected by the threat is low.



ACKNOWLEDGE AND NORMALIZE FEELINGS

- Allow children to discuss feelings and concerns, but don't force them to talk about the disaster.
- Listen, empathize, and let them know most initial reactions are normal.
- Obtain assistance for feelings and concerns that may suggest that the child (or anyone else) is in harm's way.



STRENGTHEN PEER SUPPORT

- Children with strong emotional supports are better able to cope with adversity.
- Peer relationships can decrease isolation and supplement support from caregivers who are experiencing their own distress.



TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN NEEDS

- You will be better able to help children if you are coping well.
- Take time to address your own reactions as fully as possible.
- Talk to other adults, take care of your physical and mental health, and avoid using drugs or alcohol to feel better.



SEEK HELP FOR PROLONGED SIGNS OF DISTRESS

- With the help of naturally occurring social support systems, most children will be fine. However, some may have reactions requiring professional help.
- Get professional support for children whose reactions continue or worsen after a week or more.
- Your child's school can be a great source of support.



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For additional guidance, visit
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis>

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