

## HOW YOU CAN HELP CHILDREN

**Do** try to answer questions as honestly, sympathetically and accurately as you can

**Do** continue to do the things that you normally do. Familiar routines and events will provide security

**Do** be patient and calm

**Do** be ready to listen if children want to talk about their feelings or experiences.

**Do** provide additional assurance of love and support.

**Do** reassure the child that these are normal reactions to abnormal events.

**Do** allow children to go through their own individual stages of grief.

**Do** seek support for yourself if you need it.

**Do** use words that the child can understand.

**Do** encourage the emotions of shock or grief.

**Do** point out that other people will handle their grief in different ways.

**Remember:** It's ok if children do not want to talk about their feelings

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Children and young people's reactions to loss and bereavement vary. Some have reactions that are short-lived. Others have more severe and long-lasting reactions.

If you are concerned about a child or young person, talk to the child's class teacher or the Headteacher, who may involve the school's Educational Psychologist.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Bereavement Care

[www.bereavementcareandsupport.co.uk](http://www.bereavementcareandsupport.co.uk)

Tel. 0208 4275720

Child Bereavement UK

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Tel. 0800 0288840

Winston's Wish

[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

Tel. 0845 20 30 405

# Harrow Educational Psychology Service

## Helping Children and Young People Cope after Difficult Life Events



Educational Psychology Service Office,

Tel: 0208 051 8380

## Helping Children and Young People Cope after Difficult Life Events

This leaflet aims to provide the possible range of feelings and reactions children may experience following a loss, bereavement or critical incident.

A critical incident can be defined as a sudden, unexpected event that is distressing to pupils and/or staff. It may involve violence against members of the school, a serious accident or the sudden death of a member of staff, child or young person. It could be that the school is subjected to major vandalism or attack or child or young person abduction.

Reactions will vary depending on how directly the child was involved in the incident and upon the child's personality and past experiences.

Following an incident, a range of feelings may be experienced. Some feelings may be very powerful. Children often do not have the same understanding as adults. They may have more difficulty talking about and controlling their responses to the feelings aroused by the incident.

Children's reactions will vary according to their circumstances. The following responses may be common after a critical incident:

- **Shock** – a child may be very quiet or they may cry uncontrollably;
- **Denial** – they may find it difficult to believe that something so awful has happened. If someone has died, even though they know the person has died, they may think that the person will return;
- **Searching** – they may worry about losing other people or worry whether the incident will happen again;
- **Despair** – the child may become tearful and reject the affection of others;
- **Anger** – towards the people around them or people involved in the incident, including those who may have been injured or died;
- **Anxiety** – about things they may or may not have done, or said, to have caused the incident;
- **Guilt** – they may feel that in some way they might have stopped it from happening
- **Confusion** – about what has happened to those involved in the incident, particularly if someone has died.

Children may show their feelings through behaviour rather than words. Their behaviour might include;

Behaving like a younger child

Being more irritable, naughty or aggressive

Becoming very withdrawn

Sleep disturbance including bad dreams and flashbacks of the incident, fear of being alone or fear of the dark

Wanting to be with their parents, or a trusted adult, at all times

Difficulty concentrating, especially at school

Changes in appetite or eating habits, feeling sick

Fears for their own safety, or for the safety of family or friends

Denying their grief

Being easily upset

Unwillingness to go to school

**Remember: All of these are normal reactions to a distressing event.**