

From time to time, sad events happen which are outside the range of our normal experience and these can be distressing for everyone. The purpose of this leaflet is to explain how other people (children and adults) have reacted in similar circumstances and to help you understand the normal healing process.

**Normal behaviours very commonly experienced after a crisis fall into three main types as follows:-**

- ❑ The traumatic event is constantly re-experienced in thoughts, dreams and flashbacks, in that the individual experiences the traumatic event over again - nightmares, thoughts that will not go away, over-reacting to sounds, smells, sensations associated with the trauma, e.g. sudden noises such as breaking glass, rushing water and unexpected bangs.
- ❑ Persistent avoidance of circumstances associated with the disaster or a deterioration in general responsiveness such as not talking to parents or peers, altered attitudes about the future, survivors feeling guilty about survival.
- ❑ Signs of increased physiological changes:-
  - disturbed sleep and poor concentration
  - separation difficulties
  - difficulty retaining new information and sometimes former skills
  - heightened alertness to danger
  - emergence of fears relating to circumstances connected with the disaster
  - increased irritability directed at parents and friends
  - depression
  - low mood which fluctuates or is persistent
  - low self worth
  - loss of appetite
  - anxiety and panic attacks which are triggered by features in the immediate environment and are associated in some way with the original disaster event

- bedwetting
- needing to sleep with parents
- destructive behaviour
- anti-social behaviour
- aggressive and cruel behaviour

**Commonly experienced feelings and emotions:**

- fear (Asking “What if?”)
- helplessness
- sadness
- guilt and shame (Asking “Did I do enough?”)
- longing for things to be as before and anger (Asking “Why me?”)

Everyone reacts differently. Children are affected in the same ways as adults by overwhelming events and it is normal for the effects of the event to cause debilitating behaviour changes for some time after the event. It is likely that children affected by a crisis need a great deal of adult support especially in the event of close family and friends being affected by difficult circumstances. It is likely at first that you and your child may feel numb and so act as if the event has not happened. The main tasks for parents and schools are to:-

- help the child by returning life to normal as quickly as possible whilst acknowledging the occurrence and seriousness of the event
- offer information to the involved person
- give opportunities to discuss the event

It is important to take great care of adults and children who are affected by a crisis. What is most essential is that those affected should know where they can get help if they need help. Support from family and friends is most important, as is obtaining as much information about what happened. The following are ways in which families might support:

- Talking about the event is helpful. This requires someone to listen but sometimes it can be easier for children to write, draw or mime to us or sing songs. This helps them to begin to sort out their feelings about what has happened
- Ensuring they have company to talk about what has happened, should they want it. If they prefer, they should be allowed to have private space to think about what has happened
- Acknowledging religious and cultural beliefs can be helpful for example, attending funerals, memorials services and marking anniversaries
- Giving opportunities for the affected child or adult to be in a safe situation to express their feelings about what has happened
- Allowing the child or adult to cry is very beneficial and natural and can provide relief
- Helping the child or adult to relax and engage in happier pursuits can help to relieve some of the tension

Help can be provided in school from staff and from suitably trained outside agencies such as the Educational Psychology Service, Social Services, Health professionals and charitable organisations.

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## **Kingston Educational Psychology Service**

# **COPING WITH A CRISIS**

## **Information for Parents and Pupils**