

Gowrie

INCLUSION AGENCY TASMANIA



From Inclusion Agency Tasmania

Many Tasmanians share with us a deep sadness and heartache with the recent loss of children’s lives in the Hillcrest School tragedy. Any traumatic event can take an emotional toll. Feelings of intense shock, confusion and fear or feeling numb or overwhelmed by conflicting emotions are all common. These emotions are not just limited to the people directly impacted but with news and social media coverage there is repeated exposure.

In our role, when a community traumatic event occurs, we will be faced with supporting children and families within each of our learning communities. However, just as important is supporting ourselves and our colleagues during these times. By looking after ourselves, we will be in a better position to provide support to those around us.

This edition of inclusion news provides information on supporting children through difficult events and how educators can acknowledge and begin to recover from their own reactions.

The Inclusion Agency will close at 6pm on Thursday 23rd of December 2021 and reopen on Tuesday 4th January 2022. Inclusion Agency Tasmania wishes everyone a safe holiday season. We thank you all for allowing us to support your educators and services during 2021 and look forward to collaborating with you in 2022.

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Acknowledgement



Inclusion Agency Tasmania acknowledges with deep respect the Traditional Custodians of the many lands over which we work. We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging and recognise the continuing connection and contribution the palawa peoples make to this land, the water ways and our communities.

Experiencing difficult events

Article published in 'The Spoke' Early Childhood Australia's Blog

For children who experience a critical incident, the trauma can change how they make sense of their world and where they fit in.

Trauma can have both short-term and long-term effects. Some children will seem to be recovering well, but may have a delayed response weeks or even months later. Often the signs of this may be mostly behavioural, which sometimes go unnoticed as being related to the past experience.

Parents and educators need to support children feel safe so they have the opportunity to make sense of what happened. Many children may not be able to understand how they are feeling or behaving. They need lots of support and reassurance from their family and educators to help them cope with what has happened.

Educators need to observe children to notice any behavioural changes: some children may find it more difficult to follow directions, communicate adequately or manage their emotions and relationships. Educators and families working in partnership also supports children.

Talk to children about what happened

There is a mistaken belief that young children are not affected by trauma and do not notice or even remember traumatic events. Suggestions that a child is too young to be affected, or adults deciding not to talk about the incident with the child, will not support recovery from the trauma.

If a child starts to talk about the incident, follow their lead and have a conversation. Answer their questions honestly, using language they can understand. Don't give more information than is necessary—just basic facts. When they are ready for more information, they will ask.

If adults give vague answers, don't respond, or deliberately change the subject, children may make up their own version of events. Sometimes these stories will create more anxiety for the child than the reality of what actually occurred.

Responding to children

'Tuning in' to children will make them feel connected and support their sense of wellbeing.

Children may repeatedly retell their story of the incident and it is important to listen to them calmly. They may recreate it through play, re-enacting what happened and expressing their feelings as they play.

Help children identify their feelings and name them. Encourage children to express these through creative means such as drawing, painting, clay or playdough. Have books about feelings available to them.

Create a quiet space for children for when they feel overwhelmed and provide comforting toys.

Provide consistent and predictable routines

Children who have suffered trauma are very sensitive to changes. Maintaining familiar routines with familiar people can reduce stress and help children feel safe. Warning children about change in advance can lessen their anxieties and fear.

[Reference](#)

Traumatic events: supporting children in the days and weeks afterwards

The Raising Children Network have highlighted the impact traumatic events can have and how children can be supported through the days and weeks afterwards.

Traumatic events: how children might react

Traumatic events include car crashes, natural disasters, unexpected deaths or diagnoses, and other sudden events. Children might react to events like these in many ways. For example, children might:

- feel confused or worried, or blame themselves for what happened
- be sad, angry, irritable, guilty or ashamed
- behave in difficult ways, cling to you or avoid other people
- become quiet or withdrawn
- suddenly not be able to do things they could do before, like using the toilet or getting dressed
- have physical symptoms like headaches, stomach aches or loss of appetite
- have problems sleeping or concentrating.

Supporting children of all ages after traumatic events

Children of all ages need help to cope with and recover from traumatic events in the days and weeks afterwards. Here are some things you can do.

Talking and listening

When you make time for talking with your child about the traumatic event, you can explain what has happened and what's going to happen next. For example, 'The fire burned our house down. While it's being rebuilt, we'll live with Aunty Lisa and Uncle Dave. You'll still be able to go to school and see your friends'.

Your child will probably have questions too. These questions let you check whether your child understands what's going on. They also give you clues about how your child is feeling and a chance to reassure your child. For example, 'Yes, the school is still open. You can go to school and see your friends. All your friends are OK'.

Handling reminders of the traumatic event

Your child might be frightened by reminders of the event, like smoke after a bushfire.

You can explain what's happening and let your child know that it's OK to be afraid. **Reassure your child that they're safe now.** For example, 'You're scared of the smoke because you think it's coming from a bushfire. It's smoke from the neighbour's barbecue. You're safe'.

It can also help to talk with older children and teenagers about how reminders of the event or its anniversary might make them feel and how they can cope. For example, 'Last Christmas was a tough time for our family. How are you feeling this year? What can we do to make sure it's really fun?'

Using routines

Here are some ways to use routines to support your child:

- Focus on regular healthy snacks and meals, time for exercise or play outside, and a good night's sleep. This will help to keep your child's mind and body healthy as they settle down.
- Try to get your child to continue to attend education and care, if possible. This helps children understand that their safe places and familiar people are still there for them. Let your child's educators know what has happened. This will help them support and care for your child.
- When you feel your child is ready, **encourage your child to get back into the things they enjoyed** before the trauma, like playing sport or visiting friends. And look for new positive activities that your child might enjoy.

Toddlers and preschoolers: helping them recover after traumatic events

After a traumatic event, toddlers and preschoolers might not express their feelings with words. Some children might express feelings through play, or through behaviour like tantrums. Children in this age group might also be less playful or creative after traumatic events.

There are many ways you can help your young child start feeling better:

- Help your child to name feelings – for example, ‘Something bad happened, so you feel sad. It’s OK to feel sad’. As your child starts to feel better, try to distract them with a fun game, story or song.
- If your child is very quiet and withdrawn, use play to explore emotions. For example, ‘Is Teddy sad? Do you think a hug might help Teddy?’
- If your child is having trouble separating from you, reassure your child that you’re safe and that the danger has passed. You can also ask your child’s educator for help with managing separation.
- If your child seems to have ‘forgotten’ how to do things like talking or using the toilet, remember that this is normal. Once your child feels safe, they’ll be able to do these things again.
- If habits like thumb-sucking or wetting the bed have come back, remember that this is normal. The habits will usually go away when your child feels safe again.
- If the traumatic event is in the news, help your child cope with media coverage by limiting what they see and hear. But if your child sees some media coverage and wants to talk about it, always make time to talk and listen.

School-aged children and pre-teens: helping them recover after traumatic events

Children in this age group might feel responsible for the traumatic event and have difficulty concentrating at school. They might also spend a lot of time thinking about their safety and the safety of others.

Here are some ways you can help them understand and cope with their feelings about and reactions to the traumatic event:

- If your child behaves in challenging ways, explain why they’re acting this way and help them find other ways to express feelings. For example, ‘You slammed that door really hard. I’m guessing you’re feeling angry. How about we kick the footy to get some of that anger out?’
- If your child has headaches or stomach aches, help your child to care for themselves – for example, by having a glass of water and a rest. If the problem doesn’t go away, it’s a good idea to check with your child’s GP just in case.
- If your child blames themselves for what happened, you can reassure them that they didn’t cause the event, and that nobody blames them for it.
- If the traumatic event is in the news, help your child cope with media coverage by giving them accurate, age-appropriate information, plus opportunities to talk.

[Reference](#)

What educators can expect in the short term after a disaster or community trauma

Emerging Minds have a suite of learning materials and toolkits which support working with children after a community trauma.

Returning to a teaching role in a community that has experienced a disaster can feel overwhelming. Educators play a vital role in helping communities recover after a disaster; however, it can be hard because often you have experienced loss yourself, but feel you have a responsibility to help the children in your setting.

As an educator, you too will need extra care in this time and will need to access supports that help you be present for children. This can mean having the time to reflect on what is happening for you with trusted colleagues, senior staff, family and friends. If you are feeling unsupported, it is a lot harder to look after and provide for the children in your care. Make sure to ask for help and support from others if you need it.

Educators are in a unique position to help monitor children over time and see how they are doing. Sometimes a child will not show that they are upset or distressed at home because their parents are also struggling, and educators can help identify supports that will help these families.

The majority of children will recover in the weeks and months after an event. A small percentage of children will continue to experience long-term difficulties.

Children are more likely to need more time and support if they:

- directly experienced the event
- lost a family member, loved one or pet
- are experiencing continued loss and disruption after the event.

Educators are also parents, family and community members, and often even first responders in a disaster. You may feel conflicted and torn about your different roles in the community and how much you should help others versus looking after your own 'backyard'.

During the weeks and months after a disaster or traumatic event, it can be helpful to set up both formal and informal supports within your setting, to share stories, concerns and successes. Over this time, the intensity of feelings you and the children experience may come and go but for most, they will eventually lessen. Sometimes they return when you are reminded of the event.

For some, their distressing feelings and thoughts can persist or even get worse over time. If your distress is not going away or interfering with your day-to-day life, you should discuss it with your GP and ask family and friends for support.

Lots of adults disregard their own needs and assume that they will be okay. Research has shown that an adult's wellbeing is the strongest indicator for children recovering well from trauma. Educators are vital in supporting children's recovery. It is really important that you get the help and support you need and that will help you support the children.

[Reference](#)

Disaster news and distressing news events: supporting children 6-11 years

School-age children hear and see TV, radio, social media and other media coverage of natural disasters and distressing news. This includes coverage of bushfires, floods, earthquakes, terrorism, wars, accidents, violent and sexual crime and more. They also hear adult conversations about disasters and other distressing news.

You might not be able to shield your child completely from disasters and distressing news. But talking with your child can help her understand and cope with these events.

How media coverage of disasters and distressing news events affects school-age children

Children won't always understand the news on the radio, TV and social media, but media coverage of disasters and other distressing news events can affect them.

For example, children might feel:

- frightened by what they see or hear
- upset by the stress or distress that adults around them are feeling
- worried that they or their families might get hurt
- overwhelmed by constant coverage – they might even think the disaster is happening over and over again.

Children are more likely to be affected by distressing news stories if:

- they're close to the event – for example, if there's a nearby bushfire, or if there has been an attack on a group that their family belongs to
- they're personally affected by the event – for example, if a loved one is injured or dies, or if their home, school or community is damaged
- there's a lot of coverage, especially if there's graphic video content of the event, if video shows distressed people, pets and other animals, or if coverage includes emotional commentary
- the event reminds them of a distressing experience they've had in the past
- they feel powerless – for example, if they feel they can't influence adults to do something about climate change.

Children's reactions to disaster news and distressing news events are also affected by:

- how big the event is
- how long the event goes on for
- how many people are affected.

Talking with your child about disaster news and distressing news events

Your child will cope better if he has accurate, age-appropriate information about disasters and other distressing events in the news. He also needs plenty of opportunities to ask questions and talk about feelings.

Here are some ideas for talking with school-age children about things like terrorism, natural disasters, violent crime, climate change and other disaster news and distressing events.

Make time to talk

Find the right time to talk with your child. If your child has heard distressing news at school, this might be when she gets home. Or she might want to talk at bedtime. It's always best if you make plenty of time to talk and you give your child your full attention.

If the event has affected you too, try to choose a time when you're feeling OK to talk too.

Acknowledge what has happened and find out what your child knows

It's always best to acknowledge that a disaster or tragedy has happened. If you pretend that nothing has happened, your child could feel confused and unsafe. He might also worry about things by himself.

It's a good idea to start by asking your child what they know and whether they has any questions. For example, 'On the news this morning, there was a report about a man with a gun in the city. Were people at school talking about that? What were they saying?'

Explain what has happened

Stick to the facts, reassure your child about what has happened, and try to give some context. Here are some examples of what you could say about different news events:

- 'A man in the city attacked some people and unfortunately one person died. We're not sure why the man tried to hurt people, but the police have arrested him. He's locked up so he can't hurt anyone else.'
- It hasn't rained in parts of Australia for a very long time, and lots of families are struggling to pay bills and look after their farms. This has made them sad and worried. This story was about some of these families.'
- 'I heard you talking with your friends about how the earth is getting hotter. Climate change is a problem, and there are lots of very smart scientists working on it.'

Talk about feelings

Ask your child how they're feeling and listen to what they say. Let your child know that it's OK to feel worried, angry or sad, and that over time they'll start to feel better. You can also ask them what they needs to feel better. It might reassure your child if you share your own feelings and tell them what you're doing to cope with them.

Here are some examples of how to talk about feelings and reassure children after different news events:

- 'I feel really sad for the people whose homes have burned down in the bushfires. I'm going to take Pup for a walk and think about how I could help. Would you like to come?'
- The story about the man who hurt those children is very upsetting. The man is locked away now, and good people are looking after the children. I'm trying to think about the good people.'
- It's really scary about the people with the hostages in the city. It's good to remember that the police have lots of training to help them handle this situation. Let's have a big hug to help us feel better.'

Keep making time to talk

Let your child know that you're always available to talk. And when your child wants to talk, make sure that you stop everything so you can listen and respond. You might need to check in occasionally with your child if the event goes on for a long time.

If you encourage open conversations about disaster news and distressing news events, your child learns they can always talk to you. They will understand that you'll be there to listen when something is worrying them.

[Reference](#)

Trauma—reaction and recovery

The Better Health Channel explores how adults may respond to trauma and strategies which can be put into place to resolve traumatic reactions.

It is normal to have strong emotional or physical reactions following a distressing event. On most occasions though, these reactions subside as a part of the body's natural healing and recovery process. There are many things you can do to help cope with and recover from such an experience.

A traumatic experience is any event in life that causes a threat to our safety and potentially places our own life or the lives of others at risk. As a result, a person experiences high levels of emotional, psychological, and physical distress that temporarily disrupts their ability to function normally in day-to-day life.

The way a person reacts to trauma depends on many things, such as the type and severity of the traumatic event, the amount of available support for the person following the incident, other stressors currently being experienced in the person's life, the existence of certain personality traits, natural levels of resilience, and whether the person has had any traumatic experiences before. Common reactions include a range of mental, emotional, physical and behavioural responses. These reactions are normal and, in most cases, they subside as a part of the body's natural healing and recovery process.

Examples of common reactions to trauma are:

- feeling as if you are in a state of 'high alert' and are 'on watch' for anything else that might happen
- feeling emotionally numb, as if in a state of 'shock'
- becoming emotional and upset
- feeling extremely fatigued and tired
- feeling very stressed and/or anxious
- being very protective of others including family and friends
- not wanting to leave a particular place for fear of 'what might happen'.

Mental reactions to trauma include:

- reduced concentration and memory
- intrusive thoughts about the event
- repeatedly playing parts of the event over in the mind
- confusion or disorientation.

Emotional reactions to trauma can include:

- fear, anxiety and panic
- shock – difficulty believing in what has happened, feeling detached and confused
- feeling numb
- not wanting to connect with others or becoming withdrawn from those around you
- continuing alarm – feeling like the danger is still there or the event is continuing
- let-down – after the crisis is over, exhaustion may become obvious. Emotional reactions to the event are felt during the let-down phase, and include depression, avoidance, guilt, oversensitivity, and withdrawal.

There are a number of strategies that can be put in place to help a person resolve traumatic reactions.

Some common well identified examples include:

- Recognise that you have been through a distressing or frightening experience and that you will have a reaction to it.
- Accept that you will not feel your normal self for a period of time, but that it will also eventually pass.

- Remind yourself daily that you are managing – try not to get angry or frustrated with yourself if you are not able to do things as well or efficiently as normal.
- Don't bottle up your feelings – talk to someone who can support and understand you.
- When you feel exhausted, make sure you set aside time to rest.
- Express your feelings as they arise – talk to someone about your feelings or write them down.

Any event that places a person's own life or the lives of others at risk results in the human body going into a state of heightened arousal. This is like an 'emergency mode' that involves a series of internal alarms being turned on. Emergency mode gives people the capacity to access a lot of energy in a short period of time to maximise the chance of survival.

Most people only stay in emergency mode for a short period of time or until the immediate threat has passed. However, being in emergency mode uses up vital energy supplies and this is why people often feel quite tired afterwards.

The normal healing and recovery process involves the body coming down out of a state of heightened arousal. In other words, the internal alarms turn off, the high levels of energy subside, and the body re-sets itself to a normal state of balance and equilibrium. Typically, this should occur within approximately one month of the event.

Traumatic stress can cause very strong reactions in some people and may become chronic (ongoing). Seek professional help if you:

- are unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations
- don't have normal feelings, but continue to feel numb and empty
- feel that you are not beginning to return to normal after three or four weeks
- continue to have physical stress symptoms
- deliberately try to avoid anything that reminds you of the traumatic experience
- have no one you can share your feelings with
- find that relationships with family and friends are suffering
- keep reliving the traumatic experience

Where to get help

- Your Doctor
- Local community health centres
- Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Australian Psychological Society Find a Psychologist Service (1800 333 497)
- Lifeline (13 11 14)
- Nurse-on-call (1300 606 024)

[Reference](#)

Support Services

- Lifeline
13 14 11
Tasmania—1800 984 434
- Headspace
1800 650 890
Burnie
Level 1, 10 Mount St, Burnie
(03)6408 0251

Devonport
Level 1, 35 Oldaker St, Devonport
(03)6424 2144

Hobart
49 Liverpool St, Hobart
(03)6231 3908

Launceston
Cnr Brisbane and Wellington St, Launceston
(03)6335 3100
- Relationships Australia
1300 364 277
Children’s Contact Service
Hobart—(03)6279 5080
Launceston—(03)6332 8000
Devonport—(03)6421 3600
- Blue Knot Foundation Helpline
1300 657 380
- Kids Helpline
1800 55 1800
- Beyond Blue
1300 224 636
- Anglicare
1800 243 232
Hobart 159 Collins St
Burnie 51 Wilmot St
Launceston 122 Elizabeth St
Devonport 31 King St
St Helens 56 Cecilia St
Zeehan 102 Main St



INCLUSION AGENCY TASMANIA

Please note Lady Gowrie Tasmania Inclusion Agency has offices in all three regions of the state, however, as Inclusion Professionals work predominately in early childhood and education and care services across the state, please direct any enquiries to Head Office where we can ensure a timely reply to your enquiry.

Monday to Friday 8:00am – 6:00pm (Head Office)

Operating 51 weeks of the year

After hours by arrangement

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