

Helping Students Cope with Traumatic Events

Trauma is an extremely difficult and emotional process. Students often times will be self- focused and understandably so, as they are most vulnerable at this time. Many times, however, parents may overlook the fact that students' reactions may be masked or highly emotional. Processing such events is highly complex and is largely dependent on each student's experience; each student will have different needs for appropriate support. It is important to note that an adolescent's coping skills are not fully developed and there may be a need for adult support to deal effectively with tragic events. The following are a list of suggestions that may be helpful in assisting your son/daughter through difficult coping situations:

1. Set time aside to talk with your child – help him or her to make sense of and understand the events regarding what happened.
2. Encourage your child to ask questions and engage in discussion regarding the tragic event.
3. Many times we don't know why a tragic event occurred; it is okay to acknowledge that we don't have all the answers; it is okay to focus on what you are feeling.
4. Be sensitive to the needs of your child and assist them in processing their thoughts and feelings.
5. Keep in mind that adolescents have limited coping experience/skills and may require additional support.
6. Support may include seeking additional counseling to help resolve any persisting physical or emotional symptoms and/or adjustment difficulties. Please contact your school counselor for any additional assistance you may need.
7. Remember that reactions to traumatic events vary, they can be expected, and may include the following:
 - a. Shock/Denial
 - b. Anger
 - c. Fear
 - d. Depression
 - e. Anxiety
 - f. Physical Symptoms

8. Be aware of possible “survivor guilt”: often, students may feel guilt or express that they should or could have done something to prevent it. It is important that we don’t allow students to assume that responsibility and assure them the act was beyond their control.

Communication between child and parents is vital to the needs of young persons and it is important to be attentive to the immediate and long term needs of those that have experienced a traumatic event.