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Surrey Educational Psychology Service

COPING WITH A TRAUMATIC INCIDENT

A leaflet for students, parents
and school staff

This leaflet has been produced to help in dealing with some of the reactions you may be experiencing and which may have been caused by this incident.

Importance of having correct information:

At such a stressful time rumours abound and can be damaging for all concerned. Staff at school or Local Authority officers may be able to clarify information about what has happened.

COMMON FEELINGS

FEAR

- of “breaking down” or “losing control
- of a similar event happening again
- of the suddenness and unpredictability of it all

GUILT

- for not being as “together” as others
- for feeling somehow responsible (even when others tell you that you are not)
- for being unable to do anything to help

MEMORIES

- of the shock of feelings at the time and soon afterwards
- being reminded by this of earlier losses of people close to you
- of seeing unpleasantness

SHAME

- for having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others
- for not having reacted as you

LEFT OUT

- for having been at the centre of attention for too brief a time
- and having mixed feelings about wanting to forget it/remember it
- for thinking you feel different to everyone else, e.g. not feeling like crying

ANGER

- wanting to make someone responsible for what has happened
- at the injustice and senselessness of it all

LET DOWN

- wanting an explanation to make sense of what has happened

**Nearly everyone experiences these reactions.
Nature heals through allowing these feelings to come out.
Crying can give relief.**

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SENSATIONS

These may occur hours, days or even weeks after the incident; that is quite usual. **Do** share them; let others know about them.

These include: intrusive thoughts or ideas, tiredness, sleeplessness, bad dreams, fuzziness of the mind including loss of memory and concentration, dizziness, palpitations, shakes, difficulty in breathing, choking in the throat and chest, diarrhoea, muscular tension which may lead to pain eg headaches, neck and backaches, period problems and change in sexual interest.

FRIENDSHIPS AND FAMILY

New friendships may follow from the shared experience, other relationships may be strained. Where relationships are already under some stress, this may intensify.

Misunderstanding between loved ones can occur. You may also feel that you cannot share things with your family. If so, find a member of staff at school or a friend to share things with. Talking about your feelings can help. You may feel that too little, or the wrong things are offered, or that people put too many demands on you. Small accidents are more likely to happen after severe stresses.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF COPING WITH THE FEELINGS

NUMBNESS

Your mind may allow the misfortune to be felt only slowly. At first you may feel numb. The event may seem unreal, like a dream, something that has not really happened. People often see this wrongly, either as “being strong” or “uncaring”.

GOING BACK

As you allow the disaster more into your mind, there is a need to **think** about it, **talk** about it and at night to **dream** about it over and over again. Younger and older children may play, draw about and recreate stories about the incident.

PRIVACY

In order to deal with feelings, you will find it necessary at times to be alone, just with family and close friends, or to speak to someone outside.

ACTIVITY

Helping and giving to others may offer some relief. However, too much activity is not useful if it diverts attention from the help you need for yourself.

SUPPORT

It is a relief to receive other people’s physical and emotional support. Do not reject it. Sharing with others who have had similar experiences feels good.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

- DON'T** bottle up feelings – share them.
- DO** take every opportunity to go over the experience, both within yourself and with others
- TRY NOT** to be embarrassed by your own feelings or those of others involved. Everyone expresses their feelings differently. Different cultures may have different expectations of how grief should be expressed.
- EXPECT** the memories to be with you for a long time, though their strength and scariness will fade.
- DO** let your family, friends or teachers know what help you need.

This incident has had a profound impact on the entire school community.

It has been the greatest shock for those directly involved and for those who witnessed it. It has had a great impact too on parents and teachers. Support is available for them. Such an event will have stirred up feelings for the whole

school, including staff and students who were not present at the incident; they too will need to be heard.

You will be offered some support at school but you may feel that you need to have more help. If so, consult your GP who can refer you to a specialist Counsellor or to your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. In school talk to your Tutor/ School Counsellor or ask to speak to your Educational Psychologist.

WHO CAN HELP?

CHILDLINE

0800 11 11

www.childline.org.uk

CRUSE (bereavement care)

0844 477 9400

www.cruse.org.uk

helpline@cruse.org.uk

WINSTON'S WISH (website for grieving young people and their families)

08452 03 04 05

www.winstonwish.org

info@winstonwish.org.uk

SAMARITANS (confidential emotional support)

116 123

www.samaritans.org
jo@samaritans.org

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

0345 123 2304

www.tcf.org.uk
helpline@tcf.org.uk

CHILD BEREAVEMENT UK

0800 02 888 40

www.childbereavementuk.org
support@childbereavementuk.org

RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

General:

- ❖ **Healing Grief:** A positive, self-help approach to loss, grieving and bereavement by Barbara Ward
- ❖ **Good Grief** by B.Ward Exploring feelings of loss and grief with under 11s
- ❖ **The Early Days of Grieving:** Derek Nuttal speaks simply and directly to bereaved people, offering support, explanation and information
- ❖ **Supporting Young People Coping with Grief, Loss and Death:** Weymont and Rae
- ❖ **Grief in School Communities** by Louise Rowling

Young children:

- ❖ **The Heart and the Bottle** by Oliver Jeffers

❖ **Sad Book** by Michael Rosen

❖ **The Scar** by Charlotte Moundlic

❖ **Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine** Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died, by Diana Crossley (Author) and Kate Sheppard (illustrator)

Older children:

❖ **Vicky Angel** by Jaqueline Wilson

❖ **A Monster Calls**, by Patrick Ness

❖ **When Bad Things Happen to Good People:** A wise book on suffering written by Rabbi Harold Kushner.