

Adapted from the Trauma Intervention Program, Inc. Training Manual 1996

Survivor Experiences

Feels Alone and Abandoned

Is Shocked and Confused

Experiences Guilt that He/She Could Not Prevent the Tragedy

Is Disorganized and Helpless about What to Do Now

Searches for Strength to Go On

Skills for Helping

Reach Out

Show caring and support
“I am here to be with you.”

Protect

Stay with the person and listen
“Tell me about it.”

Reassure

Give or Get Information
“What was that like for you?”

Organize

Prioritize next steps
“What do you need to do and
how can I help?”

Reinforce Strength

Reminisce about Friend
“Talk to me about your source
of strength and hope

Emotional First Aid

When someone experiences a tragedy, it is vitally important that we surround and support the survivor(s). Those that were closest to the event or loss are the most in need of care. First and foremost, we must reach out to those most impacted. These people may not feel comfortable seeking out another person to talk to, so we must reach out to them.

In a role-play format, with a partner, I would like to ask you to pretend that one of you is the young person and the other is the social worker. Social workers, take yourself through the steps of emotional first aid to support the young person. After acting through this once, switch roles. Use your handout on emotional first aid to guide yourself through the process.

Debrief:

When playing the role of the young person, did you feel strengthened and safe when you were finished?

When playing the role of the social worker, what was difficult for you to express to the young person? Were you able to support him/her effectively?

Youth In Grief

Keep in mind that students need or may benefit from any of the following:

The truth about what has happened. If there are aspects of the event that are too difficult to talk about, it is better to be honest about it than to soften the event. This is both a sign of respect for the students' integrity as well as essential for your credibility.

The opportunity to talk about the event as well as other similar events in their lives. This helps "normalize" the event as they hear that others, too, have had similar experiences. Talking eases the pressure we feel inside.

Understanding that this event might be a "trigger" which is causing them to re-experience feelings they had in the past at times of danger, threat or fear. It helps for them to know that this reaction is not unusual for people with something frightening in their histories.

Staff and other adults in their lives understanding that, if they have several of the risk factors already present in their lives, their abilities to cope with grief and tragedy at school and in the community is likely diminished.

Being allowed to access the support, even if they were not directly impacted by the event. Many students will have been "triggered" by the event and will not be able to focus on schoolwork until they have had the opportunity to process some of the newly reactivated grief. Suspend judgment about who needs special support.

Continued structure in the schedule for the day. It is usually better to continue to have

students stay at school, where they can grieve with others. They can benefit from walking through the usual class schedule. It is very helpful, however, to suspend the academic expectations long enough to process the meaning and impact of the event. In some cases, that may last the whole class period, or in extreme events, most of the day.

Consistency in discipline, with flexibility. Often at times such as this, young people feel as if life is out of control. They feel even less safe if peers' behaviors are not within the usual expectations of the classroom. Exceptions may be made in regard to expectations of how much academic work gets done for a day or two, but maintaining the structure is important.

Young people will need for you to "be there for them" by letting them talk about their fears, concerns and feelings. They need to feel safe and not judged. It may help to remember that emotions will fluctuate for the first day or two.

Encourage the young people to:

Support each other for the next while and help each other get through the day.

Put extra energy into friendships.

Take good care of themselves by getting lots of rest.

*Adapted from Crisis Resource Manual; Cheri Lovre, M.S.; PO Box 331, Salem, Oregon, 97308
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Needs of Students

An honest accounting of facts and relevant details.

Sense of safety and security – stability of adults. Is the world safe?

Opportunity to verbally or actively process the event (talking, drawing, writing, listening to other talk about the event).

Time for the reality to sink in.

To address issues again (and again and again).

To know how the family is doing

Opportunities to be actively involved in doing something helpful.

To be able to grieve with others in the context in which the deceased was known.

To express feelings, share memories, cry together.

Perhaps to repeat certain things or ask the same questions over and over.

For adults to model having feelings

For reassurance, feelings and experience to be validated.

May benefit from DOING, such as drawing pictures, cards for family, planning a memorial activity for school.

May need an opportunity to say "good-bye".

Assurance that love goes on. (The person has died, but we continue to love them.)

Understanding that the pain eases over time as we talk and grieve together.

Support from adults that going in and out of grief is normal.
Support for their thoughts and feelings balanced with expectation of appropriate behavior.
Continued structure; maintain disciplinary code with some flexibility.
Stable environment, predictable schedule (exceptions announced ASAP)
Adults to be honestly reflective of the obvious (“I can see you are sad”), rather than be artificially cheerful.
Adults to make statement of observation and reflection (“You look sad.”)
Create appropriate space and activity for young person to express feelings.
Young people need both choices and limits when grieving.
Do not give false reassurances.
To be with a supportive, trusted adult.
To have the opportunity to discuss in the classrooms. Teachers and/or social workers may lead discussion by asking:
Had some of you already heard about this? How did you hear?
How many of you have lost someone special before this?
What kinds of reactions and feelings to people experience after such tragedies?
What kinds of things have people done that have been helpful?

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