



How to cope with traumatic news - an illustrated guide

By Lucy Fahey

The era of 24-hour news brings traumatic events directly into everyone's lives. Here's how that can affect people, especially children, and some strategies for coping.

It's hard not to be upset by rolling media coverage of an unfolding tragedy.



People exposed to more than 6 hours of daily coverage of a disaster are more likely to feel

vulnerable



despairing



alienated



irritable



Loss of
identity



sense of
failure



sleepless

They can also experience intrusive thoughts and images of the event. And small, daily events can have a bigger impact than usual.



Apart from limiting exposure to media, there are things people can do to look after themselves.



Make sure they get enough sleep

Exercise regularly



Eat well

Avoid using drugs and alcohol to cope



Spend time with loved ones



Do things they
enjoy

get back into
their usual
routine

Children are especially sensitive to media coverage of disasters. They might



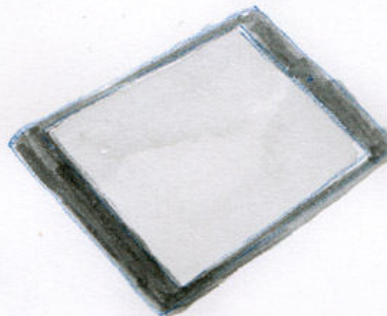
Norry the same sort of thing will happen to them & their family

Fail to understand it's a one-off, discrete event





Parents shouldn't necessarily try to shield their children. Keeping secrets is not possible in this day and age.





and trying to hide events can make things more terrifying. Instead parents should try to

limit the amount of media the child is exposed to



Explain what's happened and answer their questions



Speak to the child about their feelings

Do something else
with them,
like playing
a game or
heading
outside



Provide comfort
& affection



and help
them to
feel safe

Remind the child there are plenty of
good things that happen that don't
make the news



Transcript

It's hard not to be upset by rolling media coverage of an unfolding tragedy.

People exposed to more than six hours of daily coverage of a disaster are more likely to feel vulnerable, despairing, alienated and irritable.

They are also more likely to suffer from feelings of a loss of identity or a sense of failure, as well as sleeplessness.

They can also experience intrusive thoughts and images of the event. And small, daily events can have a bigger impact than usual.

Apart from limiting exposure to media, there are things people can do to look after themselves: make sure they get enough sleep; exercise regularly; eat well; avoid using drugs and alcohol to cope; spend time with loved ones; do things they enjoy; get back into their usual routine.

Children are especially sensitive to media coverage of disasters.

They might worry the same sort of thing will happen to them and their family, and fail to understand it's a one-off, discrete event.

Parents shouldn't necessarily try to shield their children. Keeping secrets is not possible in this day and age, and trying to hide events can make things more terrifying.

Instead parents should try to limit the amount of media the child is exposed to, while explaining what has happened and answering their questions.

It is also important to speak to the child about their feelings and do something with them, like playing a game or heading outside. Providing comfort and affection will help the child to feel safe. Parents can also remind their child there are plenty of good things that happen that don't make the news.

Sources and more information

The information in this illustration was drawn from the following articles, which also contain more details about the research behind the suggestions provided:

- ABC Health: Helping children cope with traumatic media coverage
- Trauma and Grief Network: Disasters, the media and your child (PDF)
- Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health: Supporting people affected by the Sydney siege
- ABC News: Trauma experts urge distressed people to seek help

24-hour telephone counselling

If you or someone you know needs support, call:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467