

A circular botanical illustration border surrounds the central text. It features various plants including ferns, a red maple leaf, a green leaf with a white vein, a yellow flower, a purple flower, and a green leaf with a white vein. The background is a light blue color.

Parent Information Session

How to Help Children Ages 2-5

As with babies, they typically respond to situations according to how parents react. If you are calm and confident, your child will feel more secure. If you act anxious or overwhelmed, your child may feel unsafe.



Typical reactions of children ages 2 to 5:

- Talking repeatedly about the event or pretending to “play” the event
- Tantrums or irritable outbursts
- Crying and tearfulness
- Increased fearfulness—often of the dark, monsters, or being alone
- Increased sensitivity to sounds like thunder, wind, and other loud noises
- Disturbances in eating, sleeping and toileting
- Believing that the disaster can be undone
- Excessive clinging to caregivers and trouble separating
- Reverting to early behavior like baby talk, bed-wetting and thumb-sucking



What you can do to help



- Make your child feel **safe**. Hold, hug and cuddle your child as much as possible.
- Watch what you say. Little children have big ears and may pick up on your anxiety, misinterpret what they hear, or be frightened unnecessarily by things they do not understand.
- Maintain **routines** as much as possible.
- Give extra support at bedtime. Children who have been through trauma may become anxious at night. When you put your child to bed, spend more time than usual talking or telling stories. It's okay to make a temporary arrangement for young children to sleep with you, but with the understanding that they will go back to normal sleeping arrangements at a set future date.
- Do not expose kids to the news. Young children tend to confuse facts with fears. They may not realize that the images they see on the news aren't happening again and again. They should also not listen to the radio.
- Encourage children to **share feelings**. Try a simple question such as, "How are you feeling today?"
- Enable your child to tell the story of what happened. This will help them make sense of the event and cope with their feelings. Play can often be used to help your child frame the story and tell you about the event in their own words.
- Draw pictures. Young children often do well expressing emotions with drawing. This is another opportunity to provide explanations and reassurance. To start a discussion, you may comment on what a child has drawn.
- If your child acts out it may be a sign they **need extra support**. Help them name how they feel: Scared? Angry? Sad? Let them know it is okay to feel that way, then show them the right way to behave—you can say, "It's okay to be angry, but it is not okay to hit your sister."
- Get kids involved in activities. **Distraction** is a good thing for kids at this age. Play games with them, and arrange for playtime with other kids.
- Talk about things that are going well.
- **Reassure** your children. They might feel what happened is their fault, somehow; let them know it is not.
- Expect repeated questions. That is how young children process information.

How to Help Children Ages 6-12



At this age, children are more able to talk about their thoughts and feelings and can better handle difficulties, but they still look to parents for comfort and guidance. Listening to them demonstrates your commitment. When scary things happen, seeing that parents can still parent may be the most reassuring thing for a frightened child.



Typical reactions of 6 to 12-year-olds:



- Anxiety
- Increased aggression, anger and irritability (like bullying or fighting with peers)
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Blaming themselves for the event
- Moodiness or crying
- Concerns about being taken care of
- Fear of future injury or death of loved ones
- Denying the event even occurred
- Complaints about physical discomfort, such as stomach aches, headaches, and lethargy, which may be due to stress
- Repeatedly asking questions
- Refusing to discuss the event (more typical among kids ages 9 to 11)
- Withdrawal from social interactions
- Academic problems: Trouble with memory and concentration at school, refusing to attend

What you can do to help:

- Reassure your child that they are safe. Children this age are comforted by facts. Knowledge is empowering and helps relieve anxiety.
- Keep things as “normal” as possible. Bedtime and mealtime routines help kids feel safe and secure.
- Limit exposure to TV, newspapers and radio. News footage can magnify the trauma of the event, so when a child does watch a news report or listen to the radio, sit with them so you can talk about it afterward. Avoid letting your child see graphic images.
- Spend time talking with your child. Let them know that it is okay to ask questions and to express concerns or sadness. One way to encourage conversation is to use family time (such as mealtime) to talk about what is happening in the family as well as in the community. Also ask what their friends have been saying, so you can make sure to correct any misinformation.
- Answer questions briefly but honestly., it is okay to say, “I don’t know.” Do not speculate or repeat rumours.
- Draw out children who do not talk. Open a discussion by sharing your own feelings—for example, you could say, “This was a very scary thing, and sometimes I wake up in the night because I am thinking about it. How are you feeling?” Doing this helps your child feel they are not alone in their concerns or fears. However, do not give a lot of detail about your own anxieties.
- Keep children busy. Daily activities, such as playing with friends or going to school, may have been disrupted. Help kids think of alternative activities and organize playgroups with other parents.
- Calm worries about friends’ safety. Reassure your children that their friends’ parents are taking care of them just as they are being cared for by you.
- Encourage kids to lend a hand. This will give them a sense of accomplishment and purpose at a time when they may feel helpless.
- Find out what your child is thinking. Don’t make assumptions.
- Use real words. Avoid euphemisms for death like “He went to a better place.” School-age children are easily confused by vague answers.
- Inform your child. Let them know that anger and sadness are typical, and that if they avoid feelings they may feel worse later on.
- Reassure and Validate
- Encourage meaningful memorialising. Pray together as a family and take your child with you to church to light a candle. Your child might also want to write a letter to the deceased person or draw a picture you can hang up.
- Be patient.



Looking after yourself

- Be kind to yourself
- It is okay for your children to witness your emotions
- Acknowledge your own grief and pain
- Basic routine, eat well, sleep, exercise, drink water, etc.
- Keep an Open Mind – All emotions are welcome
- Create a Safe Space and give yourself Time
- Check-in with partner or friends
- Self-Care
- Access supports, counselling services





Helpful Numbers

Helplines

- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Griefline 1800 372 826
- Kids Helplines: 1800 551 800
- Mensline: 1300 789 978
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 46 36
- Headspace: 1800 650 890

Books for children about grief



- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst 3 -10 years
 - The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr 3 – 6 years
 - The Heart and the Bottle by Oliver Jeffers 4 – 8 years
 - The Tenth Good Thing about Barney by Judith Viorst 6 – 9 years
 - The Memory Tree by Britta Teckentrup 1 – 5 years
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- Youtube



Thank you





References

Australian Childhood Foundation

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/prosody/2019/01/seven-ways-to-support-children-with-traumatic-grief-at-school/>

Child Mind Institute https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-after-a-traumatic-event/#block_64930fd840e77