Information for Parents

Serious incidents are often associated with trauma and grief. Children and adolescents may have varied experiences of grief according to a wide range of factors, including age.

What to expect
You and your child may experience some feelings of grief and these may come and go. While everyone is affected in different ways some common feelings of grief include:

Shock and disbelief
- Pretending it's all been a bad dream
- Feeling in a daze, numb, empty
- Difficulty concentrating
- It can take a while for what has happened to sink in
- Sometimes what has happened is so bad people don't want to believe it's true

Sadness
- Feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning or deep loneliness
- Crying a lot
- It helps to let these feelings out when you feel them, rather than pushing them down. Afterwards you usually feel better and have a sense of relief

Anger
- Feelings of anger, resentment and guilt
- Wanting to blame a particular person for the loss, or blame self and feel guilty

Fear
- Feelings of worry, helplessness or insecurity
- Panic attacks
Sometimes these feelings resolve themselves in a few days or weeks. For some students, symptoms persist for months.
Sometimes these feelings resolve themselves in a few days or weeks. For some students, symptoms persist for months.

Helping your child
There are a number of things parents and friends can do to help children and adolescents cope with serious incidents:

Reassure your child that the incident is over and they are safe (only if this is true)
Be helpful, understanding and supportive
When a child brings up the incident don't be afraid to talk about it
Be prepared to discuss the same details many times
Ensure they realize they are not to blame for what has happened
Do your best to be loving, understanding, supportive and predictable
Provide structure and consistency
Give your child extra attention especially at times of separation
Expect some difficult behavior
Set limits and clarify expectations
Information for Parents

When to worry
Some of the signs that may suggest your child is having difficulties include:
- Sleep disturbances such as nightmares, bed wetting, or screaming during sleep
- Preoccupation or flashbacks of the serious incident
- Distress or fear when reminded of the incident
- Loss of concentration and/or irritability
- Refusal to return to school
- Avoidance of activities, places or people associated with incident
- Increased sensitivity, hyper-vigilance or anxiety
- Physical complaints such as stomach aches, headaches or dizziness
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Decreased interest and participation in activities
- Unusual misbehaving at school or home
- Regression to more ‘babyish’ behaviour
The signs often resemble symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. If you are concerned about your child seek help or refer to the school counsellor.

School Counsellors
Parents and carers may seek advice from school counsellors about their child’s well-being and school progress.

School counsellors are experienced teachers who have a degree in psychology and post graduate qualifications in school counselling. They work with students of all ages, and their families.

School counsellors can provide advice for how to best support your child, and information about help available from other agencies.

School counsellors are not at every school every day. It is necessary for parents or carers to make an appointment by telephoning the school.

How to get help
There are several places you can get help:
- Your general practitioner
- Your community health centre
- Your school counsellor
- Mental Health Information Service 1300 794 991

If you need help now call
- Lifeline 131 114
- Parentline 132 055

Acknowledgement: Megan Cude & Steve Pinnell.