

# Coping with Adverse Community Events

The following tips are based on the literature and conversations with the Trauma Informed Care Team at IWK Health.

## Acknowledging Memorial Dates for Adverse Community Events

### For educators

Memorial dates for adverse community events can create renewed feelings of grief, anxiety, stress and/or trauma reminders, as well as a time for remembrance. Increased media attention, memorials and social media activity can be both welcomed and supportive, and overwhelming and difficult, depending on a person's or a community's experiences/supports and circumstances.

The following tips are based on the literature and conversations with the Trauma Informed Care Team at IWK Health to help you navigate ways to support your children and youth during difficult times.

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## Guidelines for Schools

- A school's response to an adverse community event(s) should be guided by a system-wide approach with flexibility built-in to be responsive to the unique experiences and needs of the members of particular schools. Consider communication strategy plans for staff, caregivers or media/public etc., as needed.
- If an adverse event did not occur on school grounds, memorials and memorial activities would generally not happen on school grounds (Exceptions may apply for schools in areas significantly impacted by an adverse event. This should happen in consultation with the community). Children and youth have to go to school and may experience stress, distress or trauma reminders (younger students just learning about it should also be considered) by a memorial or memorial activity.
  - Ideally, memorial activities would happen in the community, away from the school, allowing students to choose whether or not to visit or participate.
- Identify and discuss the particular needs of potentially vulnerable groups of students ahead of time:
  - Students who are closer to people who died, experienced loss, or were injured or participated in the rescue and relief operations.
  - Students whose parents are in 'high risk' professions (i.e., fire and police personnel).
  - Students who have a history of trauma, violence or sudden loss.
  - Students who tend to be anxious, overwhelmed or need extra supports.
  - Students with physical or developmental (dis)abilities re: safety concerns.

These students may benefit from: a conversation between the school and their caregivers to discuss any concerns; outreach that may be as simple as a discrete supportive contact from a school counselor, trusted teacher or staff member; opportunities from a designated staff for checking in about how they're doing; time out of the 'spotlight'; additional support or counseling (in school or at the IWK or Nova Scotia Health). Work with the student and/or those closest to them ahead of time in order to determine what the student would prefer.

- Staff wellness and support is a significant priority. Take a team-based approach to helping and supporting one another and do check-ins throughout the week.
- Avoid announcing memorial activities or references to the adverse community event over the school PA system. Do not facilitate safety or lockdown drills too close to a memorial date.
- In every school, at all times, there may be children and youth recovering from trauma and/or adversities. Consider ways throughout the school year to create a school culture that is trauma aware and trauma responsive.

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## Guidelines for School Staff

- Recognize that students may respond in a wide variety of ways, and this may change over time. Show patience and help students regulate and feel safe and supported in their school environment.
- Remember, for some kids their response won't look like grief, it might look like distraction, aggression, anxiety, helplessness, stomach aches, fear, confusion, hyperactivity, impulsivity, etc. Help students to regulate with exercises (e.g., breathing, grounding, yoga, physical and/or outdoor activity) or regulation items (e.g., colouring pages, fidgets, a ball), choose positive coping strategies and feel supported in a safe environment.
- Plan ahead (if needed) how to respond to related comments, questions or discussions in class. Provide honest, short, age-appropriate responses and offer support.
- Be clear that participation in any related discussions or activities is opt-in and provide simultaneous alternative activity options. Give students permission to leave an event (recommended that staff/family support students that leave).
- Provide access to counseling support (e.g., principal, guidance, school social worker, psychologist, IWK or NSH clinician, etc.) as needed.
- Consider that students may have increased safety concerns the week of a memorial event and review school safety protocols ahead of time.
- Throughout the whole year, engage students in positive, constructive activities that promote coping skills, resilience, wellbeing and a sense of community connectedness (e.g., breathing exercises, mindfulness, acts of kindness, volunteering, etc.).

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## Resources

Use your smartphone camera to scan the codes below or click the link.

### Road to Resilience Webinar Series

Child and Youth Grief and Trauma: Supporting Children, Youth and School Staff  
[https://www.youtube.com/embed/Zvy6Yap35\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/embed/Zvy6Yap35_8)



**IWK Health – Trauma Informed Care**  
[www.yourexperiencesmatter.com](http://www.yourexperiencesmatter.com)



**Staff Resiliency and Wellness for Educators**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKhazhY6LRE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKhazhY6LRE)



**National Child Traumatic Stress Network**  
[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

### Webinar Series – Coping with Tragedy



**Video 1**  
<https://youtu.be/138IWCI7tpw>



**Video 2**  
[https://youtu.be/Zvy6Yap35\\_8](https://youtu.be/Zvy6Yap35_8)