

# Coping with Adverse Community Events

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

## 8 Tips for Talking to Kids & Youth

### 1. Concentrate on making them feel safe

Children need answers to three fundamental questions:

- **Am I safe?**
- **Are you, the people who care for me, safe?**
- **How will these events affect my daily life?**

Parents should expect to answer these questions over and over again. For those with toddlers and preschool children who may not yet be able to express their concerns in words, it's still important to reassure them that everyone is safe.

Maintaining regular routines can help demonstrate that things are going to be okay despite the event that happened.

### 2. Listen and encourage questions

Listen intently and find out what your kids already know. Encourage questions. You can then respond in an age-appropriate way. The aim is not to worry them with the upsetting details, but to protect them from misinformation they may have heard from friends or disturbing images they may have seen on television or the web.

### 3. If you don't know the answer, it's okay to admit it

If your child asks a question that you can't answer, tell them so. Then do some research to try to help them sort it out. If they ask "why did this have to happen?" don't be afraid to say "I don't know". Offer reassurances that you're there to keep them safe and help your child sort through the fact that sometimes awful things happen.

### 4. Normalize and support their emotional responses

Let them know that it's OK to be frightened, sad, confused or angry; it's all part of being human. Recognize that some kids may show their distress by verbally or physically expressing their feelings or becoming very quiet. Difficult emotions can cause difficult responses. Try to stay calm and be

understanding, avoid punishing them for their reactions but you can still set limits on behaviours that are not okay. Let them know that talking may help and that you are there for them.

### 5. Follow media reports or online updates privately

Young children (in particular) can be easily distressed when seeing, or hearing, about the graphic details of an event and too much information may be more than they can cope with. Adults, too, should ensure they are dealing with their own emotions by talking to others and using trusted media outlets so they can continue to respond well to their children's need.

### 6. Give children and youth creative outlets

Some children may not be prepared to speak about what they have heard, but may find drawing, active play, journaling, playing music or other creative activities helpful to deal with their emotions and stress. Their creative activities can be helpful starting points for conversation.

### 7. Access their support networks

Remember that relationships with family, close friends and community are crucial; they are the foundation of your children's world. Let them know we're here for each other. Some children/youth may want to contribute to local community support and resiliency efforts and activities. This can help restore a sense of community, resiliency, purpose, and control after an adverse community event.

### 8. Access local resources

Most children will be able to cope with the support and understanding of their caregivers, teachers, coaches and community members. However, some may have more difficulties that are continuing and may need further help from a school counselor or other mental health provider. Please reach out if help is needed.

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## Resources

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



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



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

**Coping as a Parent - Worksheet**

[www.iwk.nshealth.ca/sites/default/files/mha/PARENT%20Resource%20Final.pdf](http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/sites/default/files/mha/PARENT%20Resource%20Final.pdf)

**Understanding Child Traumatic Stress**

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/understanding-child-traumatic-stress-guide-parents>