

## Advice on supporting your children after a traumatic event

### How children react to trauma is different from adults

How children react to trauma is different from adults – they may withdraw or behave in a more “babyish” way, seem anxious or clingy, be preoccupied with the event in their play or drawing, have problems sleeping or nightmares, or may get physical symptoms such as stomach aches or headaches.

As with adults, most children will recover with support and love from those around them.

As parents or caregivers you will know your kids best, and what works for them. Some simple *dos* and *don'ts* to guide you support a distressed child are:

#### Do:

1. **Reassure** them that the event is over and they are safe.
2. **Encourage** them to talk about how they feel about what happened.
3. **Tell them they can ask questions**, and answer these in plain language appropriate to their age – be honest but avoid details of the trauma.
4. **Tell them that feeling upset or afraid is normal**, and that telling you how they are feeling will help, that with time they will feel better.
5. **Be understanding** – they may have problems sleeping, tantrums, wet the bed – be patient and reassuring if this happens – again, with support and care it will pass.
6. **Give your children extra love and attention.**
7. **Remember that children look to their parents to both feel safe and to know how to respond** – reassure them, share that you are upset too but that you know you will all be fine together.
8. **Try to keep to normal routines** – mealtimes, bedtimes etc. – allow them to get out and play, to go to the park etc.
9. **HOWEVER if a child's distress is escalating, or they are displaying any worrying behaviours – extreme withdrawal, terror that you cannot comfort them from etc – seek help early. Your GP is a good start, OR For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, you can call or text 1737 – free, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - to talk it through with a trained counsellor.**

#### Don't:

1. **Talking about the details of a traumatic event** repeatedly can be harmful. Children may be fascinated/horrified and may want to ask about details, talk about what they saw/experienced.
2. **Don't tell them “don't worry” or “don't be upset”** – it is natural to want to protect them from fear and difficult emotions, but they need to have their feelings acknowledged and validated as a normal response.
3. **Try not to be over-protective**, again this is a natural thing for a parent to do, but as part of keeping normal routines, it is helpful for your child to be distracted by going to the park, playing with friends outdoors etc. This helps them feel that their world is safe again, and that normal life can go on.