

- Depending on the situation, you may need to explain what death means. (See Barnardos leaflets on coping with death.)

Let them be involved

- If there is a funeral or memorial event explain to your child what is involved and let the child attend if they wish to. This way the loss is made real for them but don't force your child to attend
- Explain to them what will happen before they attend, and if they would like to do something like a drawing/picture for the deceased.
- Have keepsakes for your child to remember the deceased.

Offer support

- Let your child know that you are there for them.
- Give them the option to talk to someone outside the immediate family if they wish.
- Help them anticipate and deal with reminders such as anniversaries and birthdays. Remind the child that these triggers will get easier with time.
- Keep their school informed about the situation so teachers can also support your child and look out for any change in behaviours or decline in school work.

Useful Support Services for Parents

If you are concerned about your child or feel their symptoms are getting worse, contact your local GP who can refer your child to the appropriate HSE service.

- **After Hours GP Service - North East Doctor On Call - 1800 777 911**

Free Helpline Support:

- **Samaritans - 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.ie**
- **Pieta - 1800 247 247 or text "Help" to 51444**
- **Bereavement Support Line – 1800 80 70 77 (Mon-Fri, 10am to 1pm)**
- **Text About It – text "Hello" to 50808**

Support for Children and Young People:

- **ISPCC Childline Freephone Helpline 1800 66 66 66 or www.childline.ie live chat 24hours a day 7 days a week.**

Support for Parents/Carers:

- **ISPCC Parent Support Line - 01 522 4300 (Mon– Fri, 9am–1pm (standard call rates apply) or email parentingsupport@ispcc.ie**
- **Barnardos Bereavement Helpline – 01 473 2110 (Mon-Thurs, 10am to 12 midday).**

Useful Websites:

- www.yourmentalhealth.ie
- www.spunout.ie
- www.jigsaw.ie

Helping Children (6-12 years) to cope after a traumatic event

A Guide for Parents or Carers

As a parent/carer of a child after a traumatic event it may be difficult to understand how your child will react and what you can do to help. Children are resilient and with your support and the support of those close to them, (teachers, community leaders) they can cope successfully with most situations.

Each child is different and how your child will react to what has happened will depend on a number of factors such as your child's age, whether he/she was exposed to the event, how your child has dealt with past losses, and also how you are coping.

This leaflet describes common reactions of children to trauma, how you as a parent or carer can help and where to go for further information or support.



Common reactions of children (6-12 years) to traumatic events

Some children may have very little reaction following a traumatic event, while others may react in a variety of ways immediately or seem ok at first but react later.

Some reactions that children may experience can include:

Physical reactions

Children may experience increased feelings of anxiety and fear which may result in physical reactions such as headaches, stomach aches, loss of appetite or changes in sleep pattern.

Regressive reactions

You may notice your child reverting back to some behaviour that they had previously grown out of such as bed wetting, thumb sucking, excessive clinging and not being able to sleep alone at night.

Feelings and behaviour

Children may experience sadness, anger, moodiness, distress. They may be quiet or tearful or they may have tantrums and be over active. They may find it difficult to concentrate and pay attention in play or in school. They may want to continually talk about the trauma; others may express their feelings in play and drawings.

Misconceptions surrounding the event

Children who are confused about what they saw or what has happened may fill gaps in their information with fantasies. This may lead to exaggerated thoughts, making it out to be a lot worse than it was or imagining that the trauma was avoided altogether. Your child may think there is something that they could have done to help or prevent the trauma from happening or feeling responsible in some way, which can surface feelings of guilt or self blame.

Feeling unsafe

Your child may worry that something bad will happen to them again. He/she may not like to separate from you as a parent and become distressed if separated for an extended length of time.

Reoccurring memories of the event

Children can be triggered into remembering the event by seeing something that reminds them of it and also by smells or feelings they felt at the time of the event. Memories can come in the form of flashbacks or nightmares and can be very frightening for your child. Flashbacks of previous traumatic events can re-cur. Moments of panic and fearing for their safety can result.

How you as a Parent or Carer can help

Children are more sensitive and “tuned in” to what’s going on than most people understand and are always watching how the adults around them react. By making sure that you deal with your own feelings, you will also be helping your child. Other ways that you can help are:

Ensuring a safe environment

- Reassure your child that they are safe, loved and that they have someone to talk to. As your child will look to you for assurance, it is ok that they know you feel upset to but don’t burden them with your own fears and worries. Assure your child that you are there for them, and that you will get through this.
- Let them talk, draw or use play to express their feelings. Help them understand that their feelings are normal.
- Avoid unnecessary separations from your child in the early aftermath of the event. When separating always tell them when you will return.
- Re-establish daily routines, for example, school and hobbies as soon as possible as this will provide the child with a sense of security and a sense that life is returning to normal.
- Protect your child from media cover of the event as it can trigger further fears.

Answer their questions

- Allow your child explain what they believe happened in their own words first, so that you can correct any misunderstandings that they may have about what happened.
- Let them ask questions and know it’s ok to talk about it.
- Listen to what they have to say and try to answer their questions as honestly as you can but at a level appropriate to their age and understanding.