

## Fact sheet

# Children and Young people's response to traumatic exposure

Each child's or adolescent's response will be unique and a wide range of reactions is possible.

Their reaction will be influenced by their personality, what is happening in their life now and their ability to adjust to change. Your child, whatever age, needs to find safe ways to express their feelings. They may experience a range of emotions including confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness. Parental understanding, reassurance and attention is very important at this time. Be guided by your child's need to talk and make it clear to them that you will be available whenever they need you.

Children and adolescents who have experienced other concerns or losses in their lives may find it harder to cope.

Children and adolescents who have experienced other concerns or losses (eg. separation/divorce of parents, death of a relative or pet, moving house/school) may find it harder to cope. They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even though they may have appeared to be coping before the event. If your son/ daughter is already using the services of a therapist for wellbeing concerns, you should ensure they are made aware of this event.

Children and adolescents may have many questions. They may want to know exactly what happened.

The school will have provided your son/daughter with consistent information about the incident. Specific details about a traumatic event are not provided to students as this information can be potentially harmful to students' wellbeing. As parents, it is important to steer discussion towards the positive "help seeking" actions young people can take, such as talking to a trusted adult (e.g. parent, counsellor, teacher, relative or friend), or using the agencies or websites provided in the school letter.

"Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend."

This is an important message to share with your son/daughter in any discussion about the issues. Children and adolescents sometimes share their feelings with friends—in conversations, letters, emails, text messages, on the internet, etc. If children and young people are aware of friends who they fear may hurt themselves they should tell an adult immediately.

Be aware that you or your child may be affected by possible media responses to the event.

You may decide to protect against certain coverage or watch television news coverage together so that you can discuss any reactions or concerns and ensure your son/daughter feels supported. Be aware that certain types of media reporting can add to a young person's vulnerability.



Some children and adolescents may show reactions weeks/months/a year after an event.

If you are concerned about your child's reactions—for example, if there are changes to their behaviour at school or at home—it is important to speak to the principal or student counsellor at the school. This may result in a referral to one of the agencies listed in the other attachment.

Be aware that school staff will also be affected.

Some staff may also be managing difficult emotions. Adult counselling support is provided to all school staff through a process outside the school to ensure that excellent care is being provided to your child

Respond to community concern with respect.

When speaking with other members in the community, respect the affected family and avoid sensationalising the tragedy. Encourage young people to seek help for their own wellbeing and when they have concerns about their friends.

### For more information

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#### Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

Country CAMHS (northern areas)	1800 819 089
Country CAMHS (southern areas)	(08) 8724 7055
Eastern Regional Service	(08) 7321 4500
Western Regional Service	(08) 8341 1222
Northern Regional Service	(08) 8252 0133
Marion Regional Service	(08) 7425 8600
Onkaparinga Regional Service	(08) 8326 1234