

HOW YOU CAN HELP CHILDREN YOU KNOW

Here are some ideas that might be of help to you as a parent/carer, relative or friend.

- ◆ Try to answer questions as honestly and accurately as you can in words your children will understand
- ◆ Maintain familiar routines and structures. These provide a sense of security
- ◆ Be patient and calm, if possible. Your child, or children you have contact with, may behave in a ‘younger’ way and may become difficult to manage. This is natural
- ◆ Allow children opportunities to talk about their feelings and let them know it is OK to cry
- ◆ Do not hide your own feelings from your children. It is OK for children to see you are upset. Explain, in simple terms, that everyone gets upset by such events
- ◆ Try to treat your children in your usual way. You may wish to be especially protective. This is a natural reaction but, in the longer term, being too protective can make a child feel insecure
- ◆ Be ready to LISTEN but do not be upset if your children choose not to talk. They might express their feelings in another way through play or in their behaviour

Make time for yourself and make sure that you have other adults with whom you can talk over your feelings and concerns. Your children will benefit from this.

WHERE YOU CAN GET HELP

Children’s reactions to what happened will vary a great deal. For some, the feelings of distress will be short-lived as they and the people around them gradually adjust to the tragedy. For others, the reactions may be more severe and long-lasting. There will also be those who seem to have recovered but who begin to suffer later on.

Some children and their parents/carers might benefit from talking to someone outside the family.

What the school/setting and the Local Authority can do:

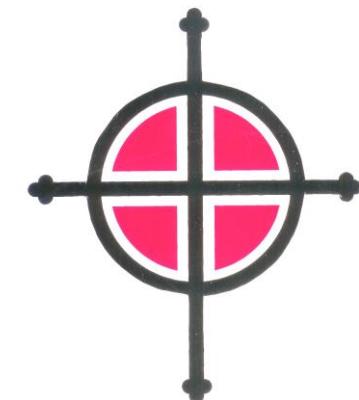
- Staff will try to understand and help
- Staff will be helped and supported by Local Authority specialists
- Group debriefing sessions can be offered in the 2/3 weeks after an incident

If you want help, please contact:

- Headteacher
- Your doctor
- Local Church Reps
- Voluntary organisations, e.g. Samaritans

What can we say to our children when something dreadful has happened?

A Guide for Parents/Carers, Relatives and Friends of
St Philip Westbrook C of E
Aided Primary School



Coping With

All those involved in the incident will have been affected in some way, though each person's experiences of the event will be personal and therefore different.

You may have thoughts and feelings unlike any others you have had before.

Your children and children you know will be having similar kinds of feelings.

This a NORMAL reaction to a very ABNORMAL experience and these emotions may last for some time.

This leaflet will help you to know how others have reacted in similar situations and help you understand what effects this experience can have on your thoughts and feelings and those of your children.

Your Feelings

This was a terrible event and the feelings and emotions you may be experiencing are a normal reaction to this.

- ◆ In the early stages, you may have been in shock and felt confused and helpless. You may also have felt fear and sadness
- ◆ As you thought about what happened, you may have felt angry with yourself, with the school/setting or with others. You may even have felt guilt and shame
- ◆ Often, physical reactions follow such events, eg, tiredness, sleeplessness, bad dreams, headaches and short temper
- ◆ Try not to bottle up your feelings. It is important to talk to others. Crying is natural and often gives relief
- ◆ As well as talking, be ready to listen to others
- ◆ You may need to have time on your own for private thoughts - explain to your family and friends, they will understand
- ◆ Accidents are more likely to occur when you are under stress: please be careful and take your time

HOW MIGHT YOUR CHILD REACT?

In tragic situations, children and young people experience similar feelings to adults. They have a need for support in coming to terms with traumatic events but they might not be able to express feelings when they cannot find the words. Children, particularly young children, often show their feelings through changes in behaviour.

These behaviours might include:

- ◆ Increased misbehaviour, aggression and 'younger' behaviour
- ◆ Children may become withdrawn
- ◆ Lots of 'pretend' play, including a desire to act out details of what took place in the original incident
- ◆ Sleep disturbance, including bad dreams, fear of being alone, fear of the dark
- ◆ Clinginess, including a desire to sleep with parents
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating, especially in school
- ◆ Children might forget things or have toileting accidents
- ◆ Heightened alertness to danger, including sensitivity to loud noises
- ◆ Changes in appetite
- ◆ Fears for their own safety or the safety of family and friends
- ◆ Reluctance to talk. Children, particularly older children, may choose not to talk for fear of upsetting family or friends
- ◆ Being easily upset by everyday events
- ◆ Unwillingness to go to school