



# Health and Wellbeing Support

## Helping young people to cope after a traumatic event

### A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As a parent or carer you may be reading this because your child has been affected by a traumatic event and you may be unsure how to support your child.

Young people react to trauma in many of the same ways that adults do. The world may suddenly seem dangerous, unsafe and uncertain. Like adults, young people may feel overwhelmed and not know how to cope. Young people are, however, resilient and with your support and the support of those close to them, they can cope successfully with most situations.

This leaflet provides information on common reactions of young people to trauma, how as a parent or carer you can help and where both parents, carers and young people can seek further support.

### Common Reactions of Young People to Traumatic Events

How young people respond to tragic events will vary from person to person. Their reaction can be influenced by many things for example, if they were directly exposed to the event, how emotionally close they were to anyone involved or hurt in the event, how they have coped with previous losses or traumas in their lives and the availability of support now.

Normal, common reactions may include the following;

#### Physical Reactions

Young people can feel drained with no energy or so alert and buzzing that they can't relax or sleep. They may be unable to concentrate and be easily distracted. They may also experience headaches or stomach aches and lose their appetite or over eat.

#### Behavioural and Emotional Reactions

Young people may behave in a manner that is regarded as out of character for them; for example, they may become unusually quiet, unresponsive or fearful of going outside, or being left alone. They may feel irritable and lose their temper easily. Their relationships with parents and friends may change and they may respond strongly to parents. They may temporarily lose interest in life and question the meaning of their existence. Some young people may turn to alcohol and drugs, thinking that this may help them cope.

#### Feelings of Stress

Showing signs of distress, being irritable, easily startled or nervous of anything that reminds them of the tragic event. Nightmares, not wanting to go out, poor concentration and difficulties with school performance are common signs of stress in this age group.

## Feelings of Loss

Traumatic events may result in losses of life, home, and previous ways of being. For some young people this may be their first experience of death and loss so they may not have the skills to confidently deal with their feelings. For others, who have previous losses, this traumatic event may trigger memories and feelings from their past. Some young people may want to talk about their loss and share memories of the person they have lost, while others may not. Some young people will want to spend time on their own while others will want to be with their friends more than ever. Increasingly young people may turn to the internet as a source of support or information.

## Guilt

Young people may blame themselves for what has happened and wish they had done things differently. Young people who survived the traumatic event may also feel survivor guilt if others have been injured or died.

## Recurring Memories of the Event

These can be experienced as flashbacks, for example intrusive images, smells or sounds of the event. Flashbacks and recurring memories can leave young people feeling nervous, expecting the worst and result in increased heart rate, rapid breathing and can be tiring, distracting, and unsettling. As a result young people can experience troubled sleep or frequent nightmares.

## How you as a Parent or Carer can Help

After traumatic experiences, it is important that you accept that your child will be distressed; this is normal. Accepting this can help you to support your child: You can offer safety, promote your child's understanding of the experience, and help them to get back to normal life.

How you cope will impact on how your child copes. This can be difficult especially if you as a parent or carer have been directly affected yourself by the traumatic event. Taking care of yourself is important including getting enough sleep, eating well, sticking to routines and seeking support from others.

If your child is in school or college, it will help to inform their school or college so that staff are aware of what has happened and can be alert to any signs of distress in the young person and offer support.

## Listen to them

- Listen to what your child already 'knows' and correct misinformation. Be mindful not to burden them with unnecessary detail.
- Be available to and patient with your child who may have questions to ask and reassure him/her that that you are there to help them understand what happened.
- If there has been previous losses, or traumas, or pain in your child's life, this may be triggered again. Give them every chance to talk about it.
- Accept if for now your child does not want to talk about the event. Asking them how they're feeling and checking in with them reassures them that you're there if and when they need to talk.

### **Talk with them**

- Expect feelings of anger, sadness, confusion, and sometimes guilt. Let them know that it's normal to feel a range of feelings.
- When you talk about the event, be honest share clear accurate information. Focus on how they're feeling and how they're coping rather than the detail of the tragic event. Don't diminish the nature of the tragedy but only give as much detail as necessary.
- Talk about your own feelings and don't be afraid to show how the tragedy is affecting you. Talk about how you're coping and don't burden your young person with your fears and worries.

### **Offer Support**

- Provide emotional reassurance and a sense of optimism about the future e.g. 'we will get through this'.
- Encourage the young person to re-establish daily routines as soon as appropriate e.g. going to school, sports and social activities.
- Give permission for the young person to express their feelings and accept that their way of coping may differ from yours e.g. (they may want to be with their friends)
- Encourage them to talk with friends and other important people in their life. The support of friends is very important at this time and can give security to young people coping with problems.
- Encourage them to participate in the wake or funeral to the extent that they feel comfortable.
- Help them find comforting routines as a way to cope. Encourage them to listen to favourite music, go for a walk, play football, or watch a DVD. This is a time to keep routines simple at home.
- Expect that concentration and attention is affected so temporarily lower your expectations of school and home performance for a few days or weeks.
- Many young people turn to the internet as a source of information and means of connecting with each other so it's important to monitor this and talk with your young person about it. Details of helpful websites are listed below.
- Internet based memorial websites are popular with young people in the days and weeks following a tragic death of a friend. Generally their use of such websites lessens with time but it's important to check in with your child and discuss their usage.
- Above all, be there for the young person. Give extra attention, support and affection.

### **Seek help if you are worried**

Most children and young people exposed to traumatic experiences show some of the psychological reactions outlined above. Fortunately, these usually lessen in the days and weeks after the event.

If the distress and reactions to the traumatic experience are marked and do not improve over the weeks and months following the trauma, for example if your child does not want to leave the home or their behaviour becomes very worrying or concerning to you, you should seek mental health support.

Signs that your child needs help include the following:

- Your child's behaviour is dangerous, reckless, or harmful.
- They seem persistently depressed or anxious.

- They start abusing substances such as drugs or alcohol or their use increases dramatically.
- They won't communicate about where they are going, what they are going through or how they are feeling
- They don't seem to be showing signs of recovery
- They seem to be struggling to cope

If you as a parent or carer are worried about your child and how they are coping, you may find it helpful to talk to your GP who can discuss the support options available, including a referral to the Children and Families Hub.

You can also call the Children and Families Hub yourself and request to speak to a Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner for advice and guidance. They will listen to the difficulties your child is experiencing and if needed, arrange an assessment by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to determine whether therapeutic support should be offered.

## Useful Support Services for Parents



### Children and Families Hub

Information, advice and support for families and young people

Open Monday – Thursday 8:30am to 5:00pm, Fridays 8:30am to 4:30pm

Contact: 01534 519000

Email: [childrenandfamilieshub@gov.je](mailto:childrenandfamilieshub@gov.je)

[gov.je/childrenandfamilieshub](http://gov.je/childrenandfamilieshub)

### YES (Youth Inquiry Service) and CAMHS Saturday Wellbeing Drop-In

Available to parents, carers and young people. A mental health practitioner is available to answer any questions in a private space and to provide support and guidance.

Open every Saturday from 11am – 4pm

Held at The Link, Eagle House, La Colomberie, St Helier, JE2 4QB

Tel: +44 (0) 1534 280530

Email: [yes@jys.je](mailto:yes@jys.je)

### Jersey Talking Therapies

Mental health support for adults from 18 years

Contact: 01534 444550

Email: [JTT@health.gov.je](mailto:JTT@health.gov.je)

[gov.je/talkingtherapies](http://gov.je/talkingtherapies)

### Jersey Hospice

Community bereavement service available to adults, young people and children

Contact: 01534 285144

[jerseyhospicecare.com](http://jerseyhospicecare.com)

## Useful Support Services for Young People

### **YES (Youth Inquiry Service)**

Advice, support and counselling for ages 13-25

Freephone: 0800 7350 010

Email: [yes@jys.je](mailto:yes@jys.je)

[yes.je](http://yes.je)

### **Kooth**

Online counselling and support for anyone aged 11 to 25. This is an online service available 24 hours and offers bookable counselling sessions from Monday to Friday 12pm to 10pm and Saturday and Sunday 6pm to 10pm

Information, advice and support for families and young people

[kooth.com](http://kooth.com)