

Supporting your child following tragic events

When something devastating happens close to home, **many parents worry about how it might affect their child** – especially if the event involves violence, loss, or danger.

Even if your child wasn't directly involved, news like this can still have an emotional impact.

It's normal to feel unsure about what to say or how much to do. The good news is: you don't need to have all the answers to be a strong support for your child.

If you're reading this, you're already doing something important. Being present, calm, and open is often the most powerful support a child can have after a distressing event. Seeking support and guidance is a sign of care, not failure.

Why events like this can affect children and teens

Children and young people can be deeply affected by secondary trauma – distress that comes from hearing about or seeing someone else's traumatic experience.

When an event feels close to home, or is repeated through news and social media, it can make the world suddenly feel unsafe.

Your child might react in ways that surprise you. **Some common responses include:**

- worry about their own safety or yours
- changes in sleep, appetite or mood
- wanting more reassurance or closeness
- irritability, anger or withdrawal
- seeming "fine" on the surface, but more unsettled underneath.

All of these responses are normal. They don't mean your child isn't coping – they mean **they're processing something big**.

Understanding grief beyond loss

Grief isn't only about death, and it doesn't only happen when someone we know dies. Children and teens can grieve:

- people they didn't know personally
- a sense of safety or predictability
- their belief that "bad things won't happen here"

Grief can show up as sadness, but also as anxiety, anger, confusion, guilt, or numbness. It can come and go over time. **Letting your child know that these reactions are normal** can be incredibly reassuring.

What helps most: feeling safe, seen and heard

You don't need the perfect words. What matters most is **helping your child feel emotionally safe**.

Start with gentle, open conversations

You might say:

- "There's been a lot in the news lately. How are you feeling about it?"
- "Some kids are finding this really upsetting — how has it been for you?"

Let them lead the conversation. If they don't want to talk right away, that's okay. Keeping the door open matters more than pushing.

It is ok to acknowledge fear without minimising it, reminding kids that these events are rare and that there are amazing people who work hard to keep us safe

Listen more than you talk

Try to listen without correcting, fixing or minimising their feelings. Statements like "It makes sense you'd feel that way" can help your child feel understood.

Offer age-appropriate information

If your child has questions, **answer them honestly but simply**. Avoid graphic details, and correct misinformation calmly. It's okay to say, "I don't know, but we can look for answers together."

Practical ways you can support your child

Limit distressing content

Repeated viewing of upsetting news or social media can increase anxiety. You can help by:

- setting boundaries around news consumption
- watching or reading updates together rather than alone
- encouraging breaks from social media when needed.

Maintain routines

Familiar routines around meals, school, bedtime and activities **help children feel secure** when the world feels uncertain.

Help them regulate their body

Stress shows up physically. **Simple grounding strategies** can help:

- slow breathing together
- gentle movement or time outside
- calming activities like drawing, music, or reading

Model healthy coping

Your child is watching how you respond. It's **okay to acknowledge your own feelings** while showing that support and help are available. This teaches them that **emotions are manageable, not something to fear**.

When to seek extra support

Some children need more support, especially if distress:

- lasts for weeks without easing
- interferes with sleep, school, or relationships
- shows up as constant fear, withdrawal, or strong behaviour changes.

Reaching out for professional support can help both you and your child navigate this together. You don't need to wait until things feel "serious" to ask for help.

Kids Helpline is here to support your child.

We're here for them, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call 1800 55 1800

Webchat at [kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au)