

NEPS advice following local tragedy

Friday, 27 March 2020

For Parents:

Dear Parents

As you are aware there has been a couple of recent tragedies in our community that will impact you and your children in different ways and some young people will be more affected than others. Normal feelings during this time include shock, disbelief and confusion.

Your teenager might experience pain and sadness or anxiety, tension and despair and even hopelessness. It is really important for you to encourage them to talk to you and for you to listen to their thoughts and feelings. Do your best to maintain some kind of routine at home and try to keep an eye on online activity.

In the current crisis face-to-face supports are hard to access but if you are worried please pick up the phone and call your GP or CAREDOC on 1850 334 999. You can encourage them to use numbers including

Samaritans 116 123; Pieta House 1800 247 247 or the Crisis Text Line, Text TALK to 086 1800 280, you, as a parent, can also access any of these supports. I know you might be reluctant during COVID-19 but if you are really concerned do contact your nearest Emergency Department.

For Students:

Dear Student

Recently, very tragic events have happened in our community and these will affect you all in different ways. Supporting and looking out for each other is very important and it will take some time to come to terms with what has happened. You might be experiencing shock and disbelief, you may feel sad, anxious and afraid, under the circumstances these are normal feelings.

Please reach out to your parents or family or to someone you can trust if you are finding things tough. Let them know what and how you are feeling. Here are some services that you can call, text or visit online to chat with a professional.

**Samaritans Freephone 24/7 Call 116 123 or Email jo@samaritans.ie
Pieta House Freephone 24/7 Call 1800 247 247 or Text HELP 51444
Crisis Text Line 24/7 Text 086 1800 280 (Normal cost of a text)**

NEPS (National Educational Psychological Services) has made the following documents available to parents and students alike to support you at this time.

1. [How to Cope when something terrible happens](#)

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HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

- Reach out – people do care
- Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy or mad
- It is acceptable to cry
- It is acceptable to smile
- If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently
- When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings perhaps with alcohol and drugs, this complicates matters rather than bringing relief
- Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
- Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you're not sure
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk
- Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time – keep busy
- Take time out – go for a cycle or kick a football
- Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen – like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits
- Use of social media can help but do not rely on it as your only source of support
- Useful websites: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

2. [Reactions to a Critical Incident](#) – can also be helpful in helping normalise the full range of reactions that are possible when tragedy strikes. While adults often know about such complex feelings, students sometimes feel guilt or anger if they (or others) do not react in certain ways.

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REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

FEELINGS		BEHAVIOURAL	
Fear	Insecurity	Nightmares	
Guilt	Mood swings	Social withdrawal	
Shame	Shock	Over reliance on use of social media	
Regret	Yearning	Irritability	
Anger	Numbness	Loss of concentration/forgetfulness	
Tearfulness	Confusion	Physical/Verbal aggression	
Loneliness	Isolation	Misuse of drugs, including alcohol	
Anxiety			

PHYSICAL		THOUGHTS	
Tiredness		Disbelief	
Sleeplessness		Denial	
Headaches		Sense of unreality	
Stomach problems - Bowel/Bladder problems		Preoccupation with images of the event/person	
Loss or increase in appetite			

3. [FAQ Parents](#) – gives clear answers to questions that parents frequently ask.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (PARENTS)

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.

Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?

A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes some time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the families and friends of those involved. Information on social media is not reliable and always needs to be checked.

Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?

A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

Q. How can I help my child?

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. Advise on and monitor safe use of social media.

Q. How long will the grief last?

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?

A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up.

Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/HSE Services.

Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.

4. [Ways to help your child through this difficult time](#) – gives you a one page guidance about supporting a child/ young person through a difficult time.

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WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, taking exercise, or talking
- Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and/or fear they are feeling
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back
- If you are out for a long time, telephone and reassure them
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services
- As well as advising your child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time. Useful website: www.webwise.ie

Students are currently engaged in teaching and learning online with their teachers. If they have any worries or they wish to chat they have their teachers, class tutors or yearheads email address. They are also listed on the Remote Learning page on the

school website. If they are still unsure of it, it is in the format of
firstname.surname@colaisteabbain.ie

If the School can help you in any way at this time do not hesitate to make contact with us at any of the following email addresses.

Guidance Counsellor

tomtynan@wwetb.ie

School Senior Management Team

johnnolan@wwetb.ie

lorrainesimmons@wwetb.ie