



Tips on supporting children

Notes on using these tips: Use and share with parents and teachers to help support children affected by a traumatic incident. Source: *Psychological First Aid Operations Guide, 2006.*
http://ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/manuals/PFA_2ndEditionwithappendices.pdf

Concern/issue	Understand	Tips
Confusion about what happened.	Give clear explanations of what happened whenever your child asks. Avoid details that would scare your child. Correct any information that your child is unclear or confused about present danger. Remind children that there are people working to support families/whānau and that your family/whānau can get more help if needed.	Continue to answer questions your children have as factually as you can.
Fears about the future	Reassure children as often as they need, that they are safe. Protect children from seeing media coverage of the traumatic incident as it can trigger fears	Reassure children of the things that will stay the same. Have ideas of other activities that children will enjoy and re-direct them away from television or internet coverage of the traumatic event.
Re-telling the event or playing out the event over and over.	Permit children to talk and act out these reactions. Let them know that this is normal. Encourage positive problem-solving in play or drawing.	Allow children to spend some time talking about or drawing pictures of what happened but encourage them to move on to other activities.
Fear of being overwhelmed by their feelings.	Provide a safe place for them to express their fears, anger, sadness, etc. Allow children to cry or be sad. Don't expect them to be brave or tough.	Say: 'When scary things happen, people have strong feelings like being mad at everyone or being very sad. Would you like to sit here with a blanket until you're feeling better?'

Concern/issue	Understand	Tips
Sleep problems including bad dreams, fear of sleeping alone, demanding to sleep with parents.	Let your child tell you about the bad dream. Explain that bad dreams are normal and they will go away. Do not ask the child to go into too many details of the bad dream. Temporary sleeping arrangements are okay; make a plan with your child to return to normal sleeping habits.	Say: 'That was a scary dream. Let's think about some good things you can dream about and I'll rub your back until you fall asleep. You can stay in our bedroom for the next couple of nights. Then we will spend more time with you in your bed before you go to sleep. If you get scared again, we can talk about it'.
Concerns about the safety of themselves and others.	Help them to share their worries and give them realistic information.	Create a worry box where children can write out their worries and place them in the box. Set a time to look these over, problem-solve and come up with answers to the worries.
Altered behaviour. Unusually aggressive or restless.	Encourage the child to engage in recreational activities and exercise as an outlet for feelings and frustration.	'I know you didn't mean to slam that door. It must be hard to feel so angry. How about we take a walk? Sometimes getting our bodies moving helps with strong feelings'.
Somatic complaints such as headaches, stomach aches, muscle aches for which there seem to be no reason.	Find out if there is a medical reason. If not, provide comfort and assurance that this is normal. Be matter-of-fact with your child. Giving non-medical complaints too much attention may increase them.	Make sure the child gets enough sleep, eats well, drinks plenty of water and gets enough exercise. Say: 'How about sitting over there? When you feel better, let me know and we can play cards'.
Concern for other victims and families/whānau.	Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden with undue responsibility.	Help children identify projects that are age-appropriate and meaningful – preparing cards, pictures, helping with baking.