Student Safety

Response to Crisis Events & Disruptions

This document is to help you to better understand the possible impacts of ongoing school disruptions, and how to identify what your child may need in terms of support.

Crisis Events & The Impacts

Following exposure to crisis events (e.g.: natural disasters, acts of violence, or threats to a school community) it is not unusual for children and youth to show symptoms of acute distress (such as shock, crying, anger, confusion, fear, sadness, etc.). In most cases, these reactions are temporary and will lessen in the days and weeks following the event. However, there are some cases where these reactions are part of more severe emotional trauma.

How adults react to a crisis can have a significant effect on how impacted children and youth will be. ***It is very important that adults remain calm and reassuring to the extent possible***. Exposure to a traumatic event alone is not necessarily enough to seriously traumatize a child. ***How the child experiences the crisis*** and their understanding of it will determine the level of impact. It is helpful for adults to understand the risk factors involved and the specific reactions to the event that signal the need for referral to a mental health professional.

Important Factors to Consider

How traumatic an event is for any person varies. If a child/youth views the event as threatening, then the greater the likelihood that the child will be impacted. These threat perceptions are determined and influenced by several factors:

1. Crisis event: Some events are more threatening than others. Emotional trauma is more likely to occur following events that are intentional human-caused acts of aggression (vs. accidents); and/or those that occur suddenly/unexpectedly, have devastating consequences, have long durations, and are intense.

2. Exposure: The closer a child/youth is to the location of a crisis event, and the longer their exposure, the greater the likelihood of the child viewing the event as personally threatening.

3. Relationships: Having relationships with the victims of a crisis (i.e., those who were injured, and/or threatened) is associated with an increased chance of viewing the event as threatening.

4. Adult reactions: Particularly among younger children, threat perceptions are influenced by adult behaviors and reactions. Events that initially are not viewed as threatening may become so

after observing the reactions of parents or teachers. Sensationalized media reports can also influence how frightening a child/youth views an event to be.

5. Individual vulnerability: Personal experiences and characteristics can influence responses:

a. Family factors. Children who are not living with their families, have been exposed to family violence, have a family history of mental illness, and/or have caregivers who are severely distressed by the disaster are more likely to be severely distressed.

b. Social factors. Children who must face a disaster without supportive and nurturing friends or relatives suffer more than those who have sources of such support.

c. Mental health. Children/youth who had mental health struggles before experiencing a traumatic event will be more likely to be severely distressed by a traumatic event.

d. Developmental level. If they perceive a situation as threatening, younger children are more likely to experience severe stress reactions than older children/youths.

e. Previous trauma experience. Children who have experienced previous threatening and/or frightening events are more likely to experience severe reactions to future events.

Know the Signs and Get Help if Needed

Parents and other important adults can help reduce the potential effects of a traumatic event by being observant of children/youth who might be at greatest risk and getting them help immediately. The mental health service providers who are part of the school system—school mental health workers and other student supports—can help teachers and parents identify children in need of extra help and can also help with referrals to resources in the community. Distinguishing "normal" from extreme reactions to trauma requires training, and any concern about a child should be referred to a mental health professional.

If you are concerned about your child's well-being or response to these crisis events, please contact the Principal at your child's school, or complete the online referral form for access to mental health services: https://tbcdsb.ontarionow.ca/child-referral/

If you are a youth who would like access to services in response to these events, please complete the following form: https://tbcdsb.ontarionow.ca/self-referral/

If you have urgent concerns about your child's well-being or behaviour, please contact Crisis Response Services by calling or texting 807-346-8282.

If you have questions or concerns, contact Katie Matthews, TBCDSB Mental Health Leader.