



SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT TIMES OF CRISIS

How can we support children at times of crisis?

- Try to answer questions as honestly and accurately as you can in words that the child will understand. Be prepared to seek feedback from the child about what you have told them so that you check out whether they have understood you or not. You may then have to re-phrase what you have said at a simpler level
- Try to maintain as many familiar routines and structures as possible. If the situation is new – for example a reception centre try and establish some routine and structure for the child as this provides a sense of security
- Be patient and calm
- Allow children opportunities to talk about their feelings and let them know it is OK to cry
- Do not hide all your own feelings – help children understand that it is normal for everyone to feel upset by such events
- Be ready to LISTEN but do not be upset/surprised if a child chooses not to talk. They might express their feelings in other ways such as through their play, drawing or their behaviour. Try to ensure that opportunities for play, drawing, and writing are available to them.

Young people can be encouraged to:

- Identify a crisis friend or friends who they can turn to. This maybe someone in their own family or not
- Keep their body going through eating, sleeping and taking exercise in small amounts
- Use their religious/personal beliefs to help them through
- Believe in themselves and their ability to get through this
- Let out their emotions where it is safe
- Imagine good times and places and how they would want things to be
- Use their head to work out plans, what has happened, what they can do and need, who can help and plans for the future
- Tell their story through dance, drama, music, writing etc.
- Ask for help if they want to hurt themselves in any way or find that they are turning to drugs/alcohol as a means of coping.

In the case of young people it is important to recognise that they, like adults want information and support but also have a need to feel that they have some choices and alternatives and some power to choose. Often our desire to protect them, as we would do younger children can interfere with the process of them regaining some sense of control over their lives. Even with younger children, fostering resilience and positive coping strategies to cope with the immediate and the future is more helpful than being over protective and trying to shelter them from the truth, however painful this may be.