

When Terrible Things Happen: For Students

When a bad thing happens, people have many different kinds of thoughts and feelings. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Some of the ways we respond may be helpful like how being around family and friends can help us feel happy or safe, while some of the ways we respond can make us feel very sad, scared, or angry.

A crisis can affect how you feel, how you think, and how you act.

You may feel confused, worried, shocked, sad, scared, angry, guilty, or numb. Maybe even scared about things that you weren't scared of before, such as being alone, being in the dark, or getting hurt.

You may have feelings in your bodies, such as:

- Being tired
- Headaches or stomachaches
- A fast heart beat
- Feeling jumpy
- Having problems sleeping

You may have thoughts, such as:

- Believing that what happened was your fault
- Images of the bad thing repeatedly popping into your head
- Nightmares
- Worrying that bad things will happen again

You may act differently:

- You may not want to be around family or friends
- You may get into more fights
- You may have a hard time concentrating or getting schoolwork done
- You may not want to talk about, think about, or have any feelings about the bad thing that happened
- You may not have as much fun as you used to
- You may not want to be around things that remind you of what happened

Many of these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors may occur when your reminded of the bad thing that happened. Reminders may include places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings related to the event.

What does NOT help when you are affected by a crisis:

- ✗ Staying away from fun activities
- ✗ Fighting
- ✗ Avoiding thinking about what happened
- ✗ Staying away from family and friends
- ✗ Avoiding asking for help when you need it
- ✗ Using drugs or alcohol
- ✗ Taking risks, such as climbing too high, being careless crossing the street, or driving recklessly

What helps when you are affected by a crisis:

- ✓ Talking to and spending time with family and friends
- ✓ Doing fun things with family and friends
- ✓ Eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising
- ✓ Getting back to a regular schedule—doing things that you would usually do
- ✓ Playing outside
- ✓ Listening to music
- ✓ Keeping a journal
- ✓ Giving yourself extra time to do homework
- ✓ Accepting that you may need extra help temporarily and being willing to ask others for support

It is okay to feel sad or scared after a bad thing happens, but if these feelings get in the way of getting along with family or friends or schoolwork, talk to an adult about your feelings.



Connecting with Others: For Students

- Talking or hanging out with other people can help you feel better.
- It is important to get support from both adults (family members and teachers) and peers your age (friends and classmates).
- It may help to spend time with other people who have been through similar experiences.

Those who can support you include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family who live with you • Extended family members who don't live with you • Adults at school (teachers, coaches, aides, administrators) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close friends/boyfriends/girlfriends • Classmates or others your age who have had experiences like yours • School counselors or other counselors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious leaders • Doctors or nurses • Pets |
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When you want to talk to someone:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Decide carefully whom to talk to by thinking about a person you trust, who listens to you, and who can help you. ✓ Choose the right time and place to talk. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ For example, a teacher may not be able to talk to you while she is teaching class, but may be happy to talk to you after class. ✓ Ask the person if it's a good time to talk. ✓ Let the person know that you want to talk. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If you don't feel like talking, tell the person that you just want to spend time with them. ✓ Start by telling the person what you need. ✓ If you feel ready, you may talk about sad or scary thoughts or feelings, but you don't have to talk about anything if you don't want to. |
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Sometimes students don't want to talk about what happened because they worry that:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other people won't want to listen or don't have time to listen. • Other people will be upset if they hear about what happened. • Adults will be mad if you talk about bad things that happened. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They will look like they are weak or scared if they ask for help. • If they let themselves feel sad or scared, they will never feel better. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – For example, some people are scared that if they start crying, they won't stop. This is not true; it actually helps to talk, as long as you wait until you are ready. |
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Do not let your worries stop you from talking to family and friends. They want to be there for you, and you will feel better if you spend time with them.

What to do:

- ✓ Tell a family member or friend that you would like to talk about what happened and your feelings about it.
- ✓ Tell family members or friends if you don't feel like talking about what happened, but want to spend time and do fun things with them.
- ✓ Remember that after something bad happens, it is ok to have many different feelings.
- ✓ Know that it is ok to spend time with people and to have fun, even during a sad time.
- ✓ Reach out to friends or family members by phone or internet.
- ✓ Get involved in support groups and community, school, or religious activities (sports, volunteering, youth groups).
- ✓ Support others; sometimes it will help you feel better, too.

Good things to do when giving support to other people:

- Let people know that you are interested in how they are feeling.
- Understand that people have all different kinds of feelings after a traumatic event. There is no right or wrong way to react. Some people cry when they are sad; other people may feel sad, but respond by being quiet, laughing, or seeming angry.
- Listen to the other person, respect his/her feelings, never make fun of the person, and encourage friends to seek support from adults when you think it might help. It always helps to be a good friend.



Tips for Relaxation

Tension and anxiety are common feelings after crises. These feelings can make it more difficult to cope with the many things that must be done to recover. Using relaxation exercises to calm yourself during the day may make it easier to sleep, concentrate, and have energy for coping with life. These exercises can include slow breathing, meditation, swimming, stretching, yoga, prayer, listening to quiet music, spending time outdoors. Here are breathing exercises that may help:

Adults and Teens	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inhale slowly (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three) through your nose or mouth, and comfortably fill your lungs. 2. Silently and gently say to yourself, "I'm filling my body with calm." 3. Exhale slowly (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three) through your mouth, and comfortably empty your lungs. 4. Silently and gently say to yourself, "I'm letting the tension drain away." 5. Repeat five times slowly.
Children (practice with your child)	<p>Let's practice a different way of breathing that can help calm our bodies down.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I want each of you to think about your favorite color. Okay, we are going to breathe in through our noses or mouths. When we breathe in, we are going to think about our favorite color and the beautiful things you connect with that color. 2. Next, we will breathe out through our mouths. When we breathe out, we are going to breathe out the gray and the uncomfortable feelings that have been building up. Let out the air, slowly and quietly. 3. Let's try it together. Breathe in really slowly and inhale thinking about your favorite color and the beautiful things connected to this color, while I count to three. One, two, three. Good job. Now, while I count again, slowly let the air out while thinking about the color gray and all the unpleasant feelings. One, two, three. Great job. Let's try it together again. [Remember to praise children for their efforts.]

Tips for Families:

- Find a room where everyone can spread out and have his/her own space.
- Some family members will want to lie down, others will want to sit. Some will want to close their eyes, and some will want to keep them open. Encourage everyone to find a way that feels most comfortable to them.
- Take time to practice this when everyone is calm. That way, everyone will be better able to use the breathing exercise when they are feeling upset.
- For young children, turn the breathing exercise into a game. Blow soap bubbles with a wand or blow cotton balls across a tabletop. Get creative and make it fun.