

Teachers

Teacher Reactions: What to Expect After Trauma

- Increased irritability and impatience with students and staff (decreased tolerance of minor student infractions- remember, they are trying to cope, too)
- Difficulty planning classroom activities and lessons
- Decreased concentration
- Worries and fears that answers or responses to students could make things worse for them
- Worries about re-occurrence and repercussions
- Increased concern about school violence (e.g., hypersensitivity)
- Feelings of discomfort with intense emotions, such as anger and fear
- Denial that the traumatic event may impact the students

Adults: What Do You Need During Grief?

Time	You need time alone and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need time to talk. You may need months and years to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.
Rest, Relaxation, Exercise, Nourishment, Diversion	You need extra amounts of things that you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, and a “cause” to work for to help others -any of these can give you a lift. You need to replenish yourself Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people and things you love.
Security	Try to reduce or find help for financial and other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into routine helps. You may need to allow yourself to do things at your own pace.
Hope	You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing some things that helped them, and realizing that they have recovered and time does help may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will feel less raw and painful.
Caring	Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy or awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering from the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person
Goals	For a while, it may seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month, helps you get through the time in the immediate future. <i>Living One Day At A Time</i> is a good rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same. This is normal. As time passes, you may need to work on some longer-range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. You may need guidance or counseling with this.
Small Pleasures	Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures, as you are ready. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food - all these are small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself
Permission to Backslide	Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is often the nature of grief up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death all at once. So, we let it in a little at a time.
Caution About Using Drugs	Even medication used to help people get through periods of shock, under a physician's guidance, may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. We cannot prevent the pain or cure the grief. The only way out of the pain of grief is to go through the experience of grieving.

Courtesy of Hospice Caring Project of Santa Cruz County - Center for Grief and Loss

Elementary Student Reactions: What to Expect After Trauma

- Feelings of anxiety, fears, and worries about safety of self and others (more clingy to teacher or parent)
- Worries about re-occurrence of violence
- Increased levels of distress (whiny, irritable, more “moody”)
- Changes in behavior:
- Increased activity level
 - b) Decreased concentration and/or attention
 - c) Withdrawal
 - d) Angry outbursts
 - e) Aggression
 - f) Absenteeism
- Increased somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Changes in school performance
- Recreating event (e.g., talking repeatedly about it, “playing” the event)
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g., sirens, planes, thunder, backfires, loud noises)
- Statements and questions about death and dying

In addition, at home parents may see:

- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Withdrawal
- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Increased negative behaviors (e.g., defiance) or emotions (e.g., sadness, fears, anger, worries)
- Regression in behaviors (e.g., baby talk, bed-wetting, tantrums)
- Hate or anger statements

Guidelines for Elementary School Teachers:

What Can I Do to Help?

- Reinforce ideas of safety and security. This may be needed multiple times, particularly in response to changes, loud sounds, or other events that may remind the students of the tragedy. After any classroom discussion of the event, end the discussion with a focus on their current safety and a calming activity, such as taking deep breaths, working together on an art project, or holding hands and singing a quiet song.
- Maintain a predictable class schedule and rules to provide support and consistency for the children.
- Listen to and tolerate your students retelling of events, as well as playing out the events. Schedule specific times for discussion and play during the school day to allow for opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings about the tragedy-, however, set limits on scary or hurtful play.
- Encourage students to talk about confusing feelings, worries, daydreams, and disruptions of concentration by accepting the feelings, listening carefully, and reminding students that these are normal reactions (any of these feelings are okay) following a very scary event. Information focused on safety will be important. For example, the President of the USA and other “helping people” (e.g., the firefighters, military, police, doctors) are all working together to make us safe (give examples). A review of school safety rules may also be helpful.
- Some students might express hate toward a large group of people. It can be helpful to validate their strong feelings of anger. However, it will be critical to help the students separate thoughts and feelings about the specific people who caused the tragedy from generalizing it to larger groups of people, including their classmates or other people they might know (e.g., all people of Arab descent).
- Young children will process the information about the events at unpredictable times throughout the day. As they try to develop an understanding of what has happened, they may ask questions that may be initially shocking to adults. Try to respond in a calm manner, answering the questions in simple, direct terms and helping the student’s transition back to their activity.
- Use simple, direct terms to describe what happened. Avoid terms designed to “soften” the information, which inadvertently further confuses children. For example, use the term “died,” rather than “went to sleep.”

- Students may misunderstand information about the event as they are trying to make sense of what happened. For example, they may blame themselves, believe things happened that did not happen, believe that terrorists are in the school, etc. Gently help students develop a realistic understanding of the event.
- Students may ask the same types of questions repeatedly, which can be confusing and/or frustrating for teachers. Understand that students may need to hear the information multiple times before being able to integrate and understand it. Give the students time to cope with fears.
- Expect some angry outbursts from students. Try to catch students before they “act out,” by taking them aside, and helping them calm down and regain control of their behavior.
- Do classroom activities that will reinforce the message that one person can make a difference to help and heal. Activities can include drawing pictures and sending cards or class projects of collecting pennies or aluminum cans.
- Encourage some distraction times, which would include doing school work that does not require high levels of new learning, as well as enjoyable activities.
- Expect some brief, temporary declines in the students’ school performance. Consider reducing homework as the nation heals and the national routine is stabilized (e.g., parents are back to work, no additional threats).
- Provide reassurance to the students that feelings will get smaller and easier to handle over time.
- Expect and understand students’ regression (acting younger) and other difficult behaviors that are not typical of the students.
- Protect students from re-exposure to frightening situations and reminders of trauma. This includes limiting teacher-to-teacher conversations about the events in front of students.
- Maintain communication with other teachers, school personnel, and parents to monitor how the students are coping with the demands of school, home, and community activities.
- Remain aware of your own reactions to students’ trauma. It is okay to express emotions to your students, such as “I am feeling sad about what happened.” However, if you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, it is important to take care of yourself and seek support from other teachers and staff.

Middle School Students Reactions: What to Expect After Trauma

- Feelings of anxiety, worries, and fears about safety of self and others
- Worries about re-occurrence or consequences such as war, as well as worries about school violence
- Changes in behavior:
 - a) Decreased attention and/or concentration
 - b) Increase in hyperactivity
 - c) Changes in academic performance
 - d) Irritability with friends, teachers, events
 - e) Anger outbursts and/or aggression
 - f) Withdrawal
 - g) Absenteeism
- Increased somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, chest pains)
- Discomfort with feelings, particularly those associated with revenge
- Increased likelihood to discuss the gruesome details
- Repeated discussions of event
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g., sirens, planes, thunder, backfires, loud noises)
- Negative impact on issues of trust and perceptions of others, particularly of those that are “different”
- Repetitive thoughts and comments about death and dying

In addition, at home Parents may see:

- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Withdrawal
- Lack of interest in usual activities (e.g., after-school activities, time with friends)
- Increased negative behaviors (e.g., defiance) or emotions (e.g., sadness, fears, anger, worries)
- Hate or anger statements
- Denial of impact

Guidelines for Teachers of Middle School Students: What Can I Do to Help?

- Reinforce ideas of safety and security. This may be needed multiple times, particularly in response to changes/loud sounds/or other events that may remind the students of the tragedy. After any classroom discussion of the event, end the discussion with a focus on their current safety and a calming activity, such as taking deep breaths, working together on an art project, or having a moment of quiet reflection.
- Listen to and tolerate your students retelling of events, as well as playing out the events. Maintain a predictable class schedule and rules to provide support and consistency for the students. Schedule specific times for discussion during the school day to allow for opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings about the tragedy. This may need to be done in multiple classes; however, set limits on scary or hurtful talk (e.g., specific threats of retribution).
- Encourage the students to talk about confusing feelings, worries, daydreams, and disruptions of concentration by accepting the feelings, listening carefully, and reminding the students that these are normal reactions (any of these feelings are okay) following a very scary event. Discuss students' perceptions of media descriptions of events. Information focused on safety will be important. For example, the President of the USA and other "helping people" (e.g., the firefighters, military, police, doctors) are all working together to make us safe (give examples). Review of school safety rules may also be helpful.
- Some students might express hate toward a large group of people. It can be helpful to validate their strong feelings of anger. However, it will be critical to help the students separate thoughts and feelings about the specific people who caused the tragedy from generalizing it to larger groups of people, including their classmates or other people they might know (e.g., all people of Arab descent). It may be helpful to have discussions about how world leaders can help with reducing hate and preventing future violent acts.
- Students will often process the information about the events at unpredictable times throughout the day. As they try to develop an understanding of what has happened, they may ask questions that may be initially shocking to adults, including questions that have gruesome details or focus on death. Try to respond in a calm manner, answering the questions in simple and direct terms and helping the student's transition back to their activity.
- Use simple direct terms to describe what happened, rather than terms designed to "soften" the information, which inadvertently further confuses the students. For example, use the term "died", rather than "went to sleep".

- Students will often misunderstand information about the event as they are trying to make sense of what happened. For example, they may blame themselves; may believe things happened that did not happen, may believe that terrorists are in the school, etc. Gently help students develop a realistic understanding of the event.
- Students may ask the same types of questions repeatedly, which can be confusing and/or frustrating for the teacher. Understand that students may need to hear the information multiple times before being able to integrate and understand it. Give the students time to cope with fears.
- Expect some angry outbursts from students. Try to catch students before they “act out”, by taking them aside, and helping them calm down and regain control of their behavior. In addition redirect students who are being irritable with each other which could escalate to direct conflict.
- Do classroom activities that will reinforce the message that one person can make a difference to help and heal. Activities can include drawing pictures and sending cards or class projects of collecting pennies or aluminum cans or making origami cranes.
- Encourage some distraction times, which would include doing school work that does not require high levels of new learning as well as enjoyable activities. Help students do activities that allow them to experience mastery and build self-esteem.
- Expect some brief (temporary) declines in the students’ school performance. Consider suspending standardized testing and classroom testing for the rest of the week. Also, consider reducing homework as the nation heals until the national routine is stabilized (e.g., parents are back to work, no additional threats).
- Provide reassurance to the students that feelings will get smaller and easier to handle over time.
- Protect students from re-exposure to frightening situations and reminders of trauma. This includes limiting teacher-to-teacher conversations about the events in front of the students.
- Maintain communication with other teachers, school personnel, and parents to monitor how the students are coping with the demands of school, home, and community activities. Should difficulties coping with the event persist and interfere with the students’ functioning, consider seeking help from a mental health professional. In addition to helping those who are clearly angry or depressed, monitor students who are withdrawn and isolated from others.
- Remain aware of your own reactions to student’s “trauma”. It is okay to express emotions to your students, such as “I am feeling sad about what happened.” However, if you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, it is important to take care of yourself and to seek support from other teachers and staff.

High School Students Reactions: What to Expect After Trauma

- Worries, fears, and anxiety about safety of self and others
- Worries about re-occurrence or repercussions such as war or school violence
- Changes in behavior:
 - a. Withdrawal
 - b. Irritability with friends, teachers, events
 - c. Anger outbursts and/or aggression
 - d. Changes in academic performance
 - e. Decrease in attention and concentration
 - f. Increase in hyperactivity
 - g. Absenteeism
- Discomfort with feelings, particularly revenge, but also those of vulnerability
- Increased risk for substance abuse, including drinking
- Discussion of events and reviewing of details
- Negative impact on issues of trust and perceptions of others, particularly those that are “different”
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g., sirens, planes, thunder, backfires, loud noises)
- Repetitive thoughts and comments about death or dying (including suicidal thoughts)

In addition, at home parents may see:

- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Withdrawal
- Lack of interest in usual activities (e.g., after-school activities, time with friends)
- Increased negative behaviors (e.g., defiance) or emotions (e.g., sadness, fears, anger, worries)
- Hate or anger statements
- Denial of impact

Guidelines for Teachers of High School Students: What Can I Do to Help?

- Reinforce ideas of safety and security, even though many high school students will not verbalize fears around these issues. This may be needed multiple times, particularly in response to changes, loud sounds, or other events that may remind students of the tragedy. After any classroom discussion of the event, end the discussion with a focus on their current safety and a calming activity, such as having a moment of quiet reflection.
- Maintain a predictable class schedule and rules to provide support and consistency for the students
- Listen to and tolerate your students retelling of events. . Schedule specific times for discussion during the school day to allow for opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings about the tragedy; however, set limits on scary or hurtful talk (e.g., specific threats of retribution). This may need to be done in multiple classes.
- Encourage students to talk about confusing feelings, worries, daydreams, and disruptions of concentration by accepting feelings, listening carefully, and reminding students that these are normal reactions following a very scary event. Discuss students' perceptions of media descriptions of events. Information focused on safety will be important. For example, discuss what the US and other world leaders are doing to address safety. From this tragedy, opportunities for learning and discussion of world events are heightened.
- Some students might express hate toward a large group of people. It can be helpful to validate their strong feelings of anger. However, it will be critical to help students separate thoughts and feelings about the specific people who caused the tragedy from generalizing it to larger groups of people, including their classmates and other acquaintances (e.g., all people of Arab descent). It may be helpful to have discussions about how world leaders can help with reducing hate and preventing future violent acts.
- Students will often process the information about the events at unpredictable times throughout the day. As they try to develop an understanding for what has happened, they may ask questions that are initially shocking to adults, including questions that have gruesome details. Try to respond in a calm manner, answering the questions in simple, direct terms and help the students to transition back to their activity.
- Students will often misunderstand the information about the event as they are trying to make sense about what happened. For example, they may blame themselves, believe things happened that did not happen, believe that terrorists are in the school, etc. Gently help students develop a realistic understanding of the event.

- Students may ask the same types of questions repeatedly, which can be confusing and/or frustrating for teachers. Understand that students may need to hear the information multiple times before being able to integrate and understand it. Give students time to cope with their fears.
- Expect some angry outbursts from students. Try to catch students before they “act out”, taking them aside, helping them calm down and regain control of their behavior. In addition, redirect students who are being irritable with each other which could escalate to direct conflict.
- Do classroom activities that will reinforce the message that one person can make a difference to help and heal. Activities can include drawing pictures and sending cards or class projects of collecting pennies or aluminum cans or making origami cranes.
- Encourage some distraction times, which would include doing school work that does not require high levels of new learning and enjoyable activities. Help students do activities that allow them to experience mastery and build self-esteem.
- Expect some brief (temporary) decline in students’ school performance. Consider suspending standardized testing and classroom testing for the rest of the week. Also, consider reducing homework as the nation heals and the national routine is stabilized (e.g., parents are back to work, no additional threats).
- Provide reassurance to students that the feelings will get smaller and easier to handle over time.
- Protect students from re-exposure to frightening situations and reminders of trauma. This includes limiting teacher-to-teacher conversations about the events in front of students.
- Maintain communication with other teachers, school personnel, and parents to monitor how students are coping with the demands of school, home, and community activities. Should difficulties coping with the event persist and interfere with students’ functioning, consider seeking help from a mental health professional. In addition to helping those who are clearly angry or depressed, monitor students who are withdrawn and isolated from others.
- Remain aware of your own reactions to students’ trauma, as well as your own reactions to the trauma. It is okay to express emotions to your students, such as “I am feeling sad about what happened.” However, if you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, it is important to take care of yourself and to seek support from other teachers and staff.

After a Disaster: What Teens Can Do

Note: Information based on brochure developed by Project Heartland - A Project of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in response to the 1995 bombing of the Murray Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Project Heartland was developed with funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in consultation with the Federal Center for Mental Health Services.

- Whether or not a disaster or violent event directly affected you, it is normal to feel anxious about your own safety, to picture the event in your own mind, and to wonder how you would react in an emergency.
- People react in different ways to trauma. Some become irritable or depressed, others lose sleep or have nightmares, others deny their feelings or simply “blank out” the troubling event.
- While it may feel better to pretend the event did not happen, in the long run it is best to be honest about your feelings and to allow yourself to acknowledge the sense of loss and uncertainty.
- It is important to realize that, while things may seem off balance for a while, your life will return to normal.
- It is important to talk with someone about your sorrow, anger, and other emotions, even though it may be difficult to get started.
- You may feel most comfortable talking about your feelings with a teacher, counselor, or church leader. The important thing is that you have someone you trust to confide in about your thoughts and feelings.
- It is common to want to strike back at people who have caused great pain. This desire comes from our outrage for the innocent victims. We must understand, though, that it is futile to respond with more violence. Hateful language or actions accomplish nothing good.
- While you will always remember the event, the painful feelings will decrease over time, and you will come to understand that, in learning to cope with tragedy, you have become stronger, more adaptable, and more self-reliant.

Después de un Desastre: Que Pueden Hacer los Jovenes

- Ya sea que un desastre o un evento de violencia le haya afectado a usted directamente, es normal sentir ansiedad sobre su propia seguridad, es normal imaginarse el evento en su mente y también es normal preguntarse a sí mismo cómo reaccionaría en un caso de emergencia.
- Las personas reaccionan de diferente manera a un trauma. Algunos se irritan o se deprimen, otros no duermen bien o tienen pesadillas, otros niegan sus sentimientos o simplemente “borran” de su mente el evento que les está causando problemas.
- Aunque se sienta mejor pretender que el evento nunca sucedió, con el tiempo es mejor ser honesto con sus propios sentimientos y permitirse a sí mismo reconocer el sentimiento de pérdida y desconcierto.
- Es importante reconocer que, mientras las cosas parecen estar fuera de balance de momento, su vida volverá a la normalidad.
- Es importante hablar con alguna persona sobre su tristeza, enojo y sobre otras emociones, aunque sea difícil empezar a hacer esto.
- Usted quizás se sienta más cómodo hablando de sus sentimientos con un maestro, un consejero o con un líder de una iglesia. Lo importante es que usted tenga alguien en quien confiar para que exprese sus pensamientos y sus sentimientos.
- Es común querer desquitarse con las personas que le han causado tanto dolor. Este deseo viene del coraje que sentimos por las víctimas inocentes. Sin embargo, debemos entender que no es necesario responder con más violencia. Las agresiones verbales o las acciones de violencia no traen nada bueno.
- Aunque usted siempre recuerde el evento, los sentimientos de dolor disminuirán con el tiempo y usted aprenderá a sobrellevar la tragedia y se volverá más fuerte, más adaptable y más independiente.