

Helping children/youth (aged 12 - 18) cope after a traumatic event

As a parent/guardian, you may be struggling with how to talk with your child/youth about serious or traumatic events. It is important to remember that children look to adults to make them feel safe. Although our first instinct may be to try and protect them from traumatic events, talking can help children/youth understand what has happened and regain a sense of safety and security. Your child/youth may have varied reactions to a traumatic event, including:

- Change in behaviour - example, isolation from others, increased worrying about the future, persistent thoughts about the event, increase in risky behaviour
- Change in mood - example, anger or resentment, mood swings, irritability, avoidance of feelings
- Change in appetite and/or sleep habits
- School refusal and/or school difficulties, including trouble with memory and concentration

What you can do as the parent/guardian:

- **Make your child/youth feel safe again** - While traumatic events can be extremely upsetting, it can be helpful to remind children/youth that this type of event is very rare. Talk about specific things you can do to make them feel secure.
- **Talk with your child/youth about what has happened** - Be prepared to talk about what happened and respond to both their fears and questions. Tell the truth based on what the known facts are without dwelling on specific details or placing judgement.
- **Listen and be open to their questions** - It's very typical for teens to say that they don't want to talk when in reality they may. Try to start a conversation while you're doing an activity together so the conversation doesn't feel too intense.
- **Maintain routines as much as possible** - There is safety in routines and knowing what to expect can reassure children/youth that life will be okay again. Getting enough rest, eating well, and keeping active are important parts of a healthy routine.
- **Help children/youth enjoy themselves** - Encourage children/youth to do activities and interact with others to gain a sense of normalcy, connection, and safety.
- **Limit media exposure as much as possible** - With the availability of personal technology, our access to information/images of traumatic events is easier than ever. Encourage your child/youth to take a break from devices and social media.

If you have concerns about your child/youth's well-being, reach out to their school to arrange a consultation with one of our mental health counsellors. You can also visit the [Mental Health and Well-Being](#) page on the TLDSB website for additional information about services in your community.

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact Communications Services at info@tldsb.on.ca.