



Save the Children

COMFORT, LISTEN AND SUPPORT

Psychological first aid for children during a crisis



A guide from Save the Children Sweden's Centre for Support and Treatment.

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About this guide

In this publication, we describe how adults can support children after critical incidents and during emergencies affecting society as a whole, both in the initial emergency phase and some time after. These are difficult events that affect many children – for example a terrorist attack, forest fire, collapse of a building, or a shooting where many were injured or otherwise affected. Not least the coronavirus pandemic has made it clear the need for guidance on how adults can increase children's sense of calm and security in emergency situations.

Crises turn everyday life upside down, and it can feel like we are losing control and hope. Children are affected in different ways depending on how close they have been to what happened, and the quality of the support around them. However, there are certain factors that, according to research and proven experience, help facilitate recovery and strengthen resilience against mental health issues after severe stress. This guide is built on the principles of psychological first aid and the five essential elements that help children recover: a sense of safety; a feeling of calm; a feeling of belonging; self-confidence and trust in society; and hope.

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to information, participation and rehabilitation. This is especially relevant in crisis support. Save the Children Sweden wants to make it easier for parents, teachers, social workers, leaders of children's activities and clubs, and other significant adults to provide initial psychosocial support, so called psychological first aid. Just as with first aid for bodily injuries, this does not require extensive training. Contributing time, commitment and calm goes a long way!

The guide has been written by licensed psychologists and psychotherapists who work at the Save the Children Sweden Centre for Support and Treatment.



What type of crisis can affect a large number of children at the same time?

The critical incidents covered by this guide include those where public services stop working as usual, meaning that many people are affected at the same time. Sometimes critical incidents can also lead to societal crises, for example terrorist attacks, natural disasters or armed conflict. But critical incidents can also be more local and affect everyone living in one place: large-scale accidents, storms, fires, murders, explosions or a revelation that several children have been sexually abused. Common to all critical incidents and societal crises is that they are characterised by uncertainty, lack of information and that it is difficult to influence the situation yourself. Sometimes critical incidents result in chaotic situations that cause fear in both adults and children.

Children are affected by critical incidents directly and indirectly. For example, children themselves can be injured, have a relative who is injured, or lose their home. But children can also be affected by more long-term consequences of critical incidents and societal crises through, for example, financial difficulties for the family, lack of social support or negative impact on education.

Crises triggered by people, such as acts of terrorism or violent conflicts, can be especially frightening. However invisible threats such as viruses or the spread of toxins can also create great and persistent anxiety, because we do not know when the danger will pass and it's hard to know if we have protected ourselves from it.



What is psychological first aid?

The purpose of psychological first aid is to protect people from further stress after frightening events, and to help them deal with strong emotions and problems they experience as a result of what happened. In this way, we make it easier for both adults and children to regain balance, find their strengths and be able to recover.

Psychological first aid for children can be practised in many different situations. It can be anything from supporting an individual child in the evening after they have received upsetting information, to talking with a whole school class the day after a terrorist attack, to meeting children at the scene of a disaster. What all these situations have in common is that adults need to be available to children, to help them find ways to calm down and create some form of order. We can vary our practice depending on the event and how urgent the situation is. However, there are some things that research has shown to reliably promote recovery for both children and adults. Save the Children Sweden provides concrete examples of activities and approaches that help to promote security, calm, community and trust in one's own ability to cope with difficult situations. In the long run, these proven strategies help the child to feel confident that adults nearby and in the community are doing everything they can to solve problems that arise.

Psychological first aid is intended to be given soon after the critical incident and serve as psychosocial crisis support. For most children this will be enough, but some children will develop persistent physical and mental health issues and will need more specialised support to feel well again. It is important to refer those children for professional help from locally available services, state-run and private services as well as non-governmental organisations.

Psychological first aid can be given individually or in groups depending on the situation. When working with groups, it's important to remember that children must participate voluntarily and should never feel pressured to talk about what

happened or how they feel. An important consideration in psychological first aid is that children themselves (just like adults) often know what usually helps them feel safe and well. We need to listen to what children say they need, both in the moment and over time – and we should always start from children's own concerns.



Common crisis reactions in children

Children show differing reactions to severe stress, fear and insecurity depending on their age, previous experiences, personality and general life situation. It is important to remember that crisis reactions are normal reactions to abnormal events, and in most cases don't last long. And just like for adults, the reactions vary from individual to individual. Some children may not show any obvious crisis reactions at all.

In a threatening situation, most of us behave in a way that feels logical at the time, even if in retrospect it may be difficult to understand why we did what we did. We might expect that everyone would respond to really threatening situations in the same way – with panic – but in fact different individuals behave differently. Some may freeze and feel that they cannot move or talk, others do their best to get away from the situation, and others try to actively combat the danger. Some people try to help others they care about and thus expose themselves to additional risk. What all these responses have in common is an attempt to stay safe. When talking about it afterwards, it may be important to discuss how it's normal to do all the things children and adults did during the emergency. This helps those affected to understand what happened and helps prevent shame or guilt for those who do not feel good about how they behaved.





When exposed to very strong stress, it is not uncommon for people to experience the environment as unreal. It can feel like we are no longer ourselves and that our senses are not working as usual. We may even feel like we are in another place or think we see ourselves from the outside. When people experience such strong feelings of unreality and can't process what is happening, they can seem shut down and confused.

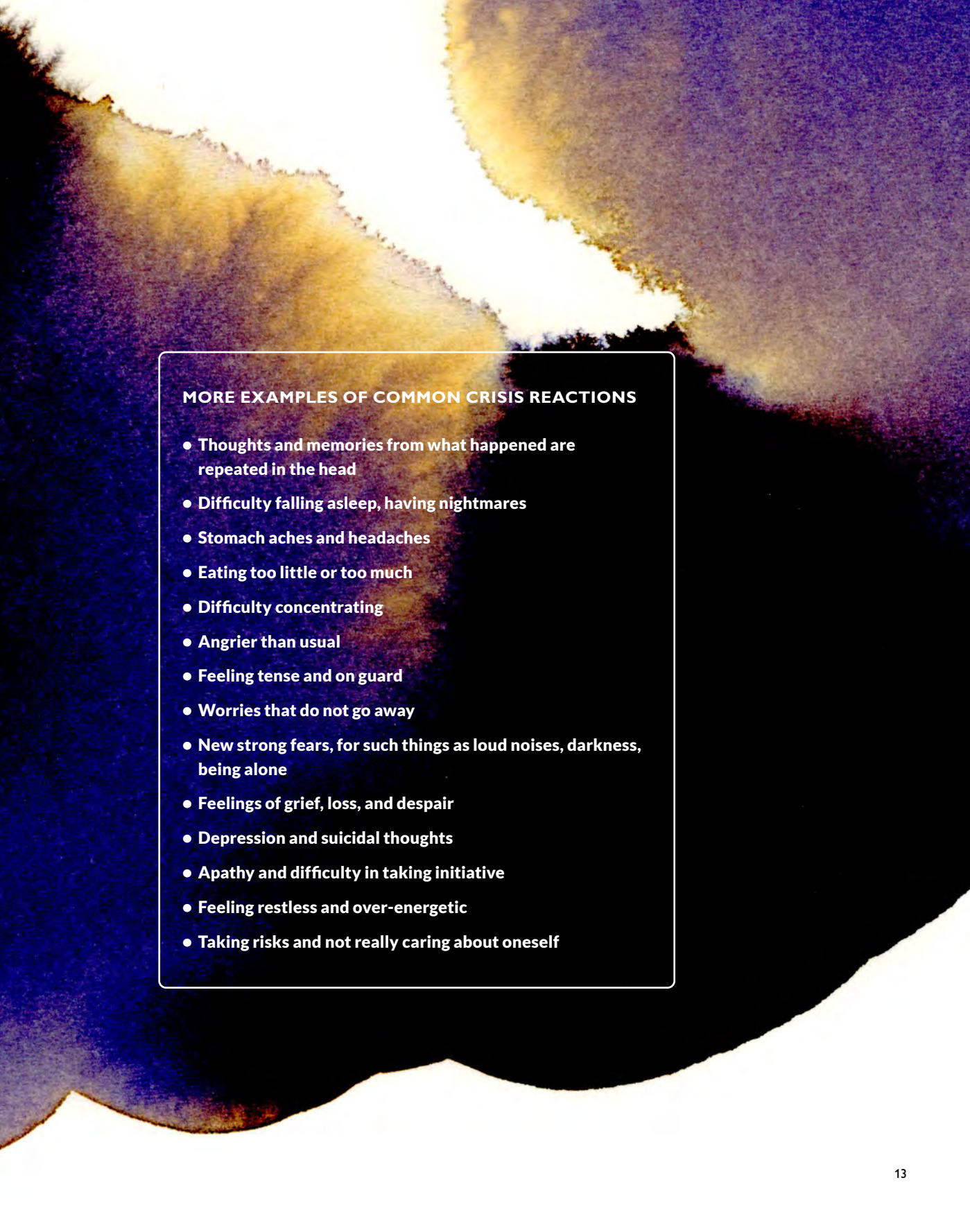
Children do not always say out loud what they feel, think or have experienced. This can be for several reasons. The child may be trying to protect their parents or other relatives from anxiety or other distressing emotions. Some may also lack the opportunity, need or desire to express themselves. How a child experienced the danger to themselves, their family or other significant people usually affects how they feel. We therefore need to be sensitive to the different signals children give, and consider the needs of the individual child. Not all children need to talk. Regardless, we can show that we are there for support. Very young children, children who have previously experienced difficult events, and children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and may need extra care to recover.

It is common for children of all ages to vary in their reactions both during the emergency and in the longer term. Sometimes they switch quickly between different emotional states. It is normal that children may be inconsolable, clingy or withdrawn, and a moment later go back to playing or look forward to something coming up that they like doing. As adults we must do our best to be flexible and meet the changing needs of the child, even if it feels difficult. It can be especially difficult when the adult who interacts with the child, is themselves suffering the effects of the incident.

Most children, regardless of age, are aware of the reactions of their parents and caregivers. They observe what emotions the adults express, how they talk and how they behave. A calm and stable adult usually also makes children feel calm

and safe. At the same time, it is completely natural for a parent in an insecure situation to feel strong emotions and need an outlet. It is not harmful to be sad or show concern for children, but it is important to avoid conveying powerlessness or scaring the child. If this happens, the child can feel that there is no hope or safety available. In all situations where children are with their parents, we therefore need to support the adults to find their way back into their parental role. This helps both parents and children to focus on the most important things right now and to create some structure, even if there is uncertainty or chaos around them.

Children in crisis sometimes seem to forget things that they have previously learned to cope with. For younger children, this can be skills such as getting to the toilet in time, falling asleep alone or eating as usual. Older children may be unable to be without a parent for a while or to do homework. These skills usually return to normal when the situation has calmed down, so adults don't need to express worry about it. It's enough to give the child the support they need during the stressful period. Make sure to plan for the fact that difficult feelings and thoughts often arise at bedtime. This is not surprising, since memories and fears often get the space to surface at that time of day.



MORE EXAMPLES OF COMMON CRISIS REACTIONS

- **Thoughts and memories from what happened are repeated in the head**
- **Difficulty falling asleep, having nightmares**
- **Stomach aches and headaches**
- **Eating too little or too much**
- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Angrier than usual**
- **Feeling tense and on guard**
- **Worries that do not go away**
- **New strong fears, for such things as loud noises, darkness, being alone**
- **Feelings of grief, loss, and despair**
- **Depression and suicidal thoughts**
- **Apathy and difficulty in taking initiative**
- **Feeling restless and over-energetic**
- **Taking risks and not really caring about oneself**

What to do first

When a critical incident has just occurred or at the beginning of a societal crisis, it is important that adults who are close to affected children, try to create their own account of what has happened and of the situation right now. This is not always easy, as there is often a lack of information and rumours can spread quickly.

It's a good idea to find out what we know about the event itself and about what support is available from local authorities, health services and voluntary organisations. Maybe a crisis centre or phone line has already been established, or maybe there is crisis support available at school?

For adults who interact with children near the physical site of a disaster or accident, it is important to stop, observe and, together with others, consider the following safety aspects:

1. Where is it safe to stay?
2. Are there children who are clearly in need of emergency medical care?
3. How do we ensure that children are moved to a place where they are safe from additional danger and frightening sights or sounds?
4. Are there children who are alone? This may be because they were alone at the site before the incident, or have become separated from parents or caregivers. It can also be because parents or caregivers are at that moment too injured or upset to take care of them.

TO PROVIDE CARE IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

After taking care of children with life-threatening injuries, it is important in the initial emergency stage to offer the remaining children care in a compassionate and respectful way.

- Offer blankets for keeping warm, and for a feeling of security.
- Take them to a safe place to sit.
- Offer something to drink.
- Be extra careful with all physical contact. Make gentle physical contact, for example on hand, forearm or shoulder.
- Tell both children and parents who you are and what your role is.
- Speak calmly and concisely. Do not ask too many questions at once.
- Only provide information that you know is correct. Do not promise anything you can't do. Repeat important information.
- Respect the needs children and parents express, and remember that various families do things differently.
- Try putting children in contact with adults or children they know.



HOW TO COMMUNICATE DURING AND JUST AFTER EMERGENCIES

Adults often underestimate what children know about ongoing crisis situations. It is important that we ask children directly what they know and if they have any questions, before we provide information. Then we can build on it with further detail, and help the child put their knowledge in context. However, some children will not be able to say what they know or what they are wondering about. In these cases, we should not pressure children or ask the same questions again.

When answering children's questions, always be honest and only say what you know. It is perfectly okay to say that we don't know exactly what happened or how many people are injured. In this case it's important to add that adults are working to find out, and that we will tell the child when we know more.

Since severe stress affects everyone's ability to think, we need to do our best to facilitate communication. For example, it's good to repeat important information to both children and parents, to write down important things for children or parents so they can remember, and to use badges showing your name and which organisation you work for. Remember also that stress can affect people's perceptions of time. As soon as practically possible, try to offer child-friendly materials for children to express themselves, such as paper, pencils and small dolls.



Promoting a feeling of security

The most important way to help children feel safe in emergencies, is to protect them from new dangers and frightening experiences. Take children to a child-safe place. If the child can be protected from external danger and feel safe as soon as possible, the risk of long-term stress reactions is reduced.

Once a child is physically safe, we can help children feel safe by telling them that the danger is over right now, that they will not be left alone, that they have done the best they can and that there are lots of people who will work together to make things better. The child also needs to have their basic needs met including warmth, drink, rest and activity, and be reunited with relatives and carers as soon as possible.

There are a lot of things adults can do to promote children's feeling of security, both at an emergency scene and in the longer term. If the situation is not actually safe yet, we can convey whatever we know about security here and now. Although it is not possible to guarantee safety, it may be possible to focus on the moment and the place right now. Explain that the child is with you right now and that, for example, police and ambulance personnel are working to make things safe.

Another important need in order to feel safe, is to understand what happened. Children have the right to factual and age-appropriate information. At the same time, we need to make sure that children are not overwhelmed by too much or too frightening information. Remind yourself that children have less experience than most adults of new environments and unexpected situations, and less knowledge of what usually happens in the aftermath of critical incidents. Maybe the child has misunderstood something and this is making them anxious?



When the situation has moved beyond the initial emergency phase, it is important to create a feeling of security in the immediate everyday environment. The child may have an increased need to be with close caregivers. It's good to return to family routines as soon as possible. Familiar routines for mealtimes and sleeping times, space for the child to be with friends and participate in activities, all help to create a feeling of security and a sense that life is continuing. It can also be important to go back to preschool or school – even if we need to lower expectations at times. When a child feels that they can cope with their everyday life and recognise themselves and their context, their feeling of security is strengthened.



WHAT IS A CHILD-SAFE PLACE?

A child-safe place is a safe and calm place adapted to children in the middle of the surrounding turmoil and it is usually set up quickly, during or soon after a crisis.*

In this place the focus is on protecting children, offering food, drink and warmth, bringing children together with caregivers, and offering community, rest and activities. Child-safe places can be set up near a disaster area, in camps or other places where affected people are. Several adults need to be present at the same time, to ensure children's safety from the surrounding emergency and prevent children being exploited or harmed. Adults also need to be knowledgeable about children's needs in high stress situations. A child-safe place needs activities adapted to children. A child-safe place can look different ways depending on what is available. At a school, it might be possible to sit on sofas, access food and computers. In other contexts, curtains or tents may be needed, to give young children peace of mind to breastfeed and to protect all children from frightening sights.

If there are children who are alone at the site, we must try to connect them with their parents, caregivers, siblings or friends at the child-safe place.

At the child-safe place, children need to know what will happen next. Maybe it is possible to make a plan with the children for the next hour? Objects that are comfortable to touch, stuffed animals to cuddle with, dolls to take care of, small figures to act out stories with, paper, pencils, craft accessories, playing cards, balloons, balls and books are examples of suitable materials. It is also good to have mobile phones or computers so children and parents can be supported to contact relatives.

Feel free to start games that are easy to understand and do together — for example mimicking games, draw and guess, playing cards, building with blocks, dancing to music, playing peek-a-boo with the smallest children, and taking care of dolls and soft toys.

*This is not to be confused with what international children's organisations call a child friendly space. Further reading: Operational Guidance for Child Friendly Spaces in Humanitarian Settings. World Vision International and IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, Copenhagen (2018).



TIPS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Introduce yourself and say what you can help with.

"Hello my name is...and I work for..."

Support parents to take care of their own children.

Support parents and carers to care for children even in a very difficult situation.

"Is there anything I can do to make it easier for your family?"

"What would help you to support your child right now?"

"What do you usually do to calm your child? Should we try it?"

Speak using everyday words.

Avoid using graphic descriptions and scary words such as terrible, panic or horrible.

Acknowledge feelings and provide comfort.

See if you can find a quiet place that makes it easier for children and parents to ask questions and say what they need help with.

"You seem scared, can we take a deep breath together and then we'll see how I can help you?"

"How about we sit here for a while?"

If a child wants to talk, take the time to listen.

Normalise and explain common crisis reactions.

"It can be difficult to think clearly when we get scared, sometimes it can feel like our head is spinning."

"It's common to feel weird when really scary things happen. Even our bodies can feel strange."

Find out what the child usually does to calm down.

"What do you usually do when you are worried? What usually calms you down?"

Counter feelings of guilt.

"You could not have done more; it would have been very dangerous."

"It's very hard right now. I can see you're doing the best you can."

Encourage the child's spontaneous positive strategies.

"That looks cosy. You have wrapped yourself so nicely in the blanket!"

"Great that you can hold the glass!"

"I saw you helped to pick up pencils. That was kind of you!"



Promoting a feeling of calm

Promoting a feeling of calm is about helping children regain their balance in the moment and in the long run. It is important to figure out what will calm each particular child. Many children are reassured by gentle physical contact or by some form of activity. Some like warmth and rest, while others are comforted by physical activities or an opportunity to help with practical things. To find the right things to do, we need to pay attention to the children's body language, what they say, and what they initiate.

It may be good to start with a gentle touch such as placing a hand on the forearm or shoulder and offering something to drink or eat. We can show children that it is okay to react in many different ways, and that it's normal to feel strong emotions or to think unpleasant thoughts. We can also help children express what worries them most at the moment, and together try to solve these issues. Focusing on practical things together makes the situation understandable, and shows children that we are all working together to deal with what's happened.

"Experienced adults are working to sort everything out. There are a lot of us working together right now. Is there anything you are wondering about?"

"It's complicated now. We don't really know what's going on. But soon we will find out more. Shall we draw together while we wait?"

"How about we try to find your friend?"



CALMING THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN

A child's age and ability to understand the situation will affect their overall stress level. Younger children primarily understand the situation based on how parents or other people around them react to what has happened. We must therefore give extra support to adults who take care of the youngest children, so they can behave as calmly as possible. The youngest children are primarily calmed by meeting their most basic needs, such as emotional and physical closeness, nourishment and rest. They may also need to be protected from loud noises and bright lights.

Tips for caregivers:

- **Hold and rock the child**
- **Speak in a calm voice**
- **Try to provide food and drink that the child is used to**
- **Sing your usual songs**
- **Play what you normally play**
- **Get help from another adult if you do not have the strength or ability**

EXERCISES THAT CAN CALM A SLIGHTLY OLDER CHILD

If the child is very stressed, it can be helpful to breathe together.

"When it feels this difficult, it can help to breathe calmly. Shall we try to do that together?"

"Put a hand on your stomach, like this." (show on yourself)

"Good, just like that. When we inhale through the nose, the stomach gets bigger and when we exhale through the mouth, the stomach is drawn in (show on yourself) – let's try together! Now let's breathe in slowly while I count to three, then let's hold our breath and breathe out just as slowly. Now let's practice a few times together, good!"

You can also calm breathing through play: blow bubbles in a glass of water with a straw, make bubbles with bubble gum, blow soap bubbles or inflate balloons. Stand on either side of a table and blow something light between you.

If the child experiences feelings of unreality or they feel empty and shut off, it can help to suggest doing something together. Making the body active can allow the mind to start working again, and open up to contact with others. Together you can:

- **Stomp with your feet on the ground/floor.**
- **Clap your hands against your thighs or play a clapping game together.**
- **Take turns looking for things in the surrounding environment such as four sounds, four things the same colour or four things you can feel on your bodies. Take turns telling each other about them.**
- **Throw a ball between you.**

When the immediate danger is over and everyday life has begun to return, it can help the child to practice thinking about a calming place.

"I would like you to think of a place that feels calm and comfortable – maybe it exists in reality but it could just be in your imagination. Maybe it's when you sit on the couch and watch a good film, play games – or can it be when you have just won a match and are sitting in the locker room?"

"When you think of your quiet place: What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? Think about it for a bit."

"Try to think of the quiet place, how does it sound? How does it smell? How does it feel in your body? Do you want to tell?"

"What feels calm in your body? Can you focus on that and take a few deep breaths with me?"

"Can you think of a word that reminds you of your quiet place? Maybe that word can help you relax?"

For slightly older children, a mobile phone can be helpful in calming down. Save the Children's app *Safe Place* is a free tool that can be used to relieve stress, worry and anxiety. It has practical exercises that can help in the moment but also, with regular use, in the long term. *Safe place* is available in English and other languages.

Promoting a sense of belonging

Promoting a sense of belonging means ensuring a child does not feel lonely or abandoned during and after a difficult event. Both children and adults who feel a connection with others, and feel that someone is there to help, have an easier time recovering.

For children, caregivers they have a close connection to are the most important source of protection, security, and emotional support. Therefore, it is important to put the child in touch with someone they know as soon as possible. Sometimes it is possible to bring family members together at a site, other times we can support the child to seek contact themselves.

"Are you here with anyone?"

"Do you want help calling someone? Let's find the phone number."

It can also be helpful to gather children in groups with reliable adults who can pay attention to their needs, provide calm, give information and offer activities. Adults should listen to the whole group to find out what is most important to them right now, check if they have understood correctly, and involve the children in setting priorities. It might be useful to create an action plan together.

"What do you think we should do first?"

"Shall we make a feel-good list? Who has suggestions?"

Focusing on practical things together makes the situation feel more under control, and emphasises that we are helping each other to deal with it. Later on, when everyday life has returned, children may need support from various people and in different contexts, to deal with the difficult things that have happened.

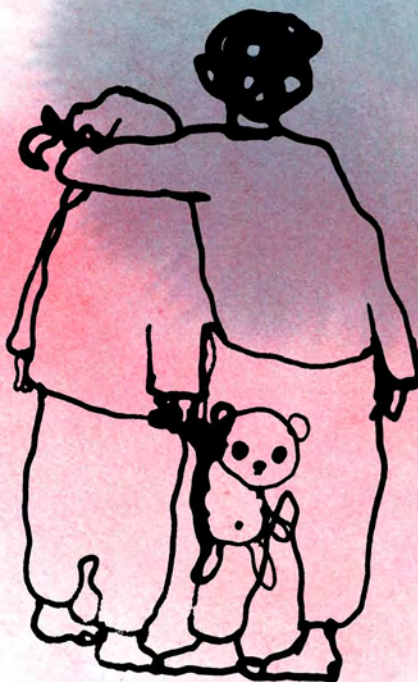
"Do you want to tell any of your friends? Do you want me to help? Would it help if I call your friend's parents and tell them?"

"How should we talk to school about this? Who do you think we should contact first?"

"Shall we talk a bit when you have finished school?"

"Where does it feel safe to play outside? Which adults could come along?"

In the longer term, it can be valuable to develop a ritual to process events, together with one child or in a group. Involve the participating children in planning and execution based on their age and maturity. All children are usually able to participate in some way. Perhaps hold a moment of remembrance by lighting candles, singing, writing and drawing or organising a gathering. Sometimes it can be valuable to visit the scene of the incident.



Promoting self-confidence

Promoting self-confidence means helping a child to gain experience of understanding himself or herself, regain a sense of control and feeling of being capable. A good way to promote this is to give children simple tasks. Depending on how old children are, they can also help out during the emergency stages of an incident. Maybe a younger child can help pick up paper and pencils and a teenager can read a story to smaller children. When a child participates in familiar activities with other children, such as card games, crafts or a sports activity, it can help them feel like themselves again. Doing something they are used to, and know how to do, increases feelings of calm and control.

"Can you help me hold the glass?"

"Shall we get something together to play with?"

Even though children are more vulnerable than adults during critical incidents, we must not forget that children also have resources. Being active and involved can help a child feel capable, reduce feelings of helplessness, and create meaning. But children also feel more self-confident when we show them that they can trust their own responses. We can support confidence by listening, trying to understand what they need, and telling them it is perfectly okay to feel strong emotions. We can ask questions that emphasise the child's own resources to help himself or herself:

"What else do you usually do when you are sad or worried?"

"Is there anything you usually do to calm down? Is that something you want to do right now?"

In the longer term, it is important that children return to routines, social connections and activities in everyday life. Participating in activities at school or putting on the football jersey in the locker room with your teammates can strengthen feelings of being in control of the situation.



Promoting trust in society

Promoting trust in society means ensuring that a child does not feel excluded or exceptionally vulnerable, during and after a critical incident. When many people are affected, it often becomes clear that society (including government, police, schools and other important organisations) were not sufficiently prepared. If children and their parents and carers lose trust in society, the world as a whole might feel threatening. This can reinforce children's feelings of anxiety and sadness, but also of anger and disappointment. Therefore, it is important to tell children what people and authorities are doing to alleviate the impact of what's happened and prevent it from happening again.

Honest information along with concrete action can help rebuild trust. After a school shooting, for example, it can be important for children to see that the classroom has been put in order, that things are fixed, that routines and structures eventually continue as before. If an adult has sexually abused several children, it is important for affected children and families to be given information about what action is being taken by police, social services and prosecutors. In an emergency, it can be difficult to know





when help is coming and who is doing what, but it is still important to share whatever information is available.

Many people become anxious when terrible things happen, and it can be difficult to know whether to trust things we hear. Rumours can spread quickly and contribute to anxiety. Encourage children to ask an adult they trust if they hear something that scares them or sounds strange.

At a later stage, it may be a good idea to involve children and parents who are affected, or live in the immediate area, by gathering information on their needs and suggestions. It is important to clarify who is responsible for which action and how it will be followed up. This reduces the risk of individual groups feeling singled out or losing faith in society's capacity to support them. At the same time, doing this facilitates joint action.

Promoting a feeling of hope

It can feel impossible to express hope when the situation seems hopeless, and to provide a sense of safety when the situation is not actually secure. But when a child is helped to feel confident in their own abilities, to feel a connection with other children and adults, and to see how people around them are helping to repair what's happened, they gain feelings of hope and security. When a child manages a task, feels that they have a role in helping, or can make themselves understood and express their needs, this also creates hope for the near future. With the right support from adults and peers, children who have been exposed to difficult events can recover, and feel well again.

"I know this sounds strange, but even though it feels awful right now, it will feel better after a while."

"There are a lot of people helping each other. Together we will manage this."

"We will be able to do fun things again, even if that doesn't feel possible now."

To convey hope even in the most difficult situations, adults who support children also need support from other adults around us. Those who are supporting children need time to reflect on what they need so they can be available for children, and adults need an outlet for common feelings such as feeling inadequate, stressed or frustrated.

"Who do I usually talk to when things feel difficult?"

"What can I do to feel calmer and gain strength?"

It is not possible to change what has happened, but it is possible to create good conditions for dealing with the impact.

Just like adults, children facing danger, death, and destruction may need to talk about existential issues.

"Why are things like this happening?"

"Why did this happen to me?"

"Will more dangerous things happen to me?"

Adults do not need to have all the answers. It is enough to make time to talk, and not avoid talking about difficult thoughts and subjects. Maybe the child has their own explanations using faith or philosophy? Many people who have been through difficult things later feel that they have matured and gained new insights. If we get enough support through a crisis, we can increase our understanding of others' difficulties and increase our self-confidence. The right support can contribute to a feeling that 'if I have managed this, I can manage other things in life as well'.

When a child does not feel better

Most children recover on their own with the support of their loved ones after severe stress. But for some, really frightening experiences can trigger various forms of persistent mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress, depression or anxiety. Other difficulties that may persist over time are risky behaviours such as defiance, anger or substance abuse. Children can also get stuck in grief. If a child does not function as usual and suffers mentally more than a month after the critical event, it is important that trained professionals make a trauma assessment.



Selection of sources

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This guide describes how adults can support children after critical incidents and during society-wide crises.

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As the world's largest independent child rights organisation, Save the Children can act where children need us the most – in Sweden and around the world. By focusing on sustainable, long-term efforts, we make both immediate and lasting impacts in children's lives. In other words – we make the world a better place for children, every day.



Save the Children