

Acknowledging the Anniversary

For parents & caregivers

As we move closer to the anniversary of the mass tragedy in Nova Scotia on April 18th and 19th 2020, we want to acknowledge that this may be a particularly challenging time for children, youth, families and communities in Nova Scotia.

Anniversaries can create renewed feelings of grief, anxiety and trauma, as well as concerns about something like this happening in the future. The increased media attention, memorials and social media activity surrounding an anniversary can be both welcomed and supportive, and overwhelming and difficult, depending on an individual's or a community's experiences and circumstances.

The following tips are based on the literature and conversations with the Trauma Informed Care Team at IWK Health to help you navigate ways to support your children and youth during this time.



8 Tips for Talking to Kids & Youth

1. Concentrate on making them feel safe

Children need answers to three fundamental questions:

1. Am I safe?
2. Are you, the people who care for me, safe?
3. How will these events affect my daily life?

Parents should expect to answer these questions over and over again. For those with toddlers and preschool children who may not yet be able to express their concerns in words, it's still important to reassure them that everyone is safe, and that life will continue in a normal fashion. Maintaining regular routines can help demonstrate that things are going to be okay despite the event that happened.

2. Listen and encourage questions

Find out what your kids already know. Encourage questions. You can then respond in an age-appropriate way. The aim is not to worry them with the upsetting details, but to protect them from misinformation they may have heard from friends or disturbing images they may have seen on television or the web.

3. If you don't know the answer, it's okay to admit it

If your child asks a question that you can't answer, tell them so. Then do some research to try and help them sort it out. If they ask "Why did this have to happen?" don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Offer reassurances that you're there to keep them safe and help your child sort through the fact that sometimes awful things happen.

4. Normalize and support their emotional responses

Let them know that it's OK to be frightened, sad, or angry; it's all part of being human. Recognize that some kids may act out their distress by acting out or becoming very quiet. Difficult emotions can cause difficult behaviour. Try to stay calm and show understanding, avoid punishing them for their reactions but you can still set limits on behaviours that are not okay. Let them know that talking may help and that you are there for them.

5. Follow media reports or online updates privately

Young children (in particular) are easily traumatized, and seeing, or hearing, about the horrifying details of the event may be more than they can cope with. Adults, too, should ensure they are dealing with their own emotions by talking to others, so they can continue to respond well to their children's need.

6. Give children and youth creative outlets

Some children may not be prepared to speak about what they have heard, but may find drawing, journaling, playing music or other creative activities helpful to deal with their emotions and stress. Their creative activities can be helpful starting points for conversation.

7. Access their support networks

Remember that relationships with family, close friends and community are crucial; they are the foundation of your children's world. Let them know we're here for each other. Some children/youth may want to contribute to local community support and resiliency efforts and activities. This can help restore a sense of community, resiliency, purpose and control after a tragedy.

8. Access local resources

Most children will be able to cope with the support and understanding of their parents, teachers, coaches, and community members. However, some may have more difficulties that are continuing and may need further help from a school counselor or other mental health provider. Please reach out for help if needed.

Resources

Use your smartphone camera to scan the codes below or click the link.



Road to Resilience Webinar Series

www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health/parents/road-resilience-webinar-series



IWK Health - Trauma Informed Care

www.yourexperiencesmatter.com



National Child Traumatic Stress Network

www.nctsn.org



Coping as a Parent - Worksheet

www.iwk.nshealth.ca/sites/default/files/mha/PARENT%20Resource%20Final.pdf