

# mental health support for australian students, teachers, and schools following large scale incidents

Large scale distressing events impact our school communities in many ways.

## support for students

- students may have been exposed to distressing images published by the media or streamed on social media
- content can be extremely distressing and triggering for adults, children and young people
- parents and schools should try to take steps to minimise their exposure to graphic and distressing content
- schools may see a change in behaviour for some students, who may be finding the recent incident confronting and distressing



**Students may want to discuss the incident with friends or in the classroom and share opinions and views, which is a normal response to a tragic incident. It is recommended that staff listen carefully and answer questions based on fact and avoid personal commentary or value statements. School staff should guide conversation with messages of safety, self-care, and seeking help**

- at times like this students look to teachers to make sense of the world. It can be hard to provide responses which make sense and reassure students. It is appropriate to recognise and respond to students in distress
- any staff concerned about particular students should make this known to counselling and support staff within their school or refer them through normal counselling pathways

- it will be important to monitor students who may feel vulnerable, and ensure those who have experienced trauma in the past have access to additional support
- **common causes of distress may be related to:**
  - having been directly at risk from the events
  - being concerned about family and friends
  - feelings and memories related to previous experiences
  - other grief and loss.
- for some, where the harm has been caused intentionally, this may be an added source of stress and generate a sense of insecurity or distrust
- for most people, these feelings usually settle within a few weeks, particularly when support has been provided. While most will manage with the support of family and friends, there are still times when someone may need extra help and support. **Support you may be able to offer includes:**
  - check in regularly with students that you're worried about to see how they are coping
  - encourage students to reach out to friends for support in addition to adults
  - provide information and access to student counselling services
  - discuss with parents and carers about support services that can be accessed outside of school.

## monitoring students

Distress may include some or all of the following:

- anxiety associated with a sense of loss of security and safety
- reactivation of previous problems
- increased sensitivity to issues of justice and equity
- behavioural changes, such as withdrawal or acting out
- peer conflict
- carrying the anger of others and seeking to express it.

## what can teachers do?

Teachers can support in the following ways:

- acknowledge students' feelings
- let students know that it is difficult to deal with the feelings provoked by events of such magnitude
- discuss issues in a manner that takes into account students' age and maturity
- answer questions in a simple honest way, using language that is age appropriate and without including personal views and opinions
- be honest and stick to facts. Don't speculate about what has happened or where an attack might happen. Don't dwell on the scale or scope of the event, particularly with young children
- assist students to communicate their concerns to parents and carers
- express hope in the future
- report any incidents or concerns you have regarding a student's wellbeing or behaviour.

## help students feel safe

- reassure students of their safety at school; comfort them, remind them that they are safe and that these events are very rare
- maintain normal routines and schedules
- deal with fears by reminding students that many good things still occur in the world
- encourage students to participate in their faith community if relevant

- help children to separate angry thoughts and feelings about specific people, who behave in violent ways, from the larger cultural or religious group to which those people may belong
- remind students that it is important to talk to someone they trust, such as a family member, friend, teacher or school counselling staff member if they are feeling distressed.

## sources of support for children and young people

School counselling staff will be available to support students. If students would like to speak with someone anonymously, confidential sources are:

- Kids Helpline (1800 551 800 or [kidshelp.com.au](http://kidshelp.com.au))
- headspace (1800 650 890 or [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au))



## school community

**An incident relating to specific communities is likely to have emotional impacts on those communities and other groups within Australian schools. You may like to seek opportunities to reassure those in your school community that the school will provide the structure and support for all students, including those feeling vulnerable or distressed by this incident.**

## support for staff

School staff may also require additional support, especially if they have family or friends who have been affected by a large scale tragedy. It is important to take the time to identify if any are affected and discuss the types of support that are available to assist.

## support options for staff include:

- general counselling services through your school or education sector
- external support services, including their local GP, Beyond Blue, Lifeline, or other local community services
- encouraging them to reach out to family and friends for support.



**If a young person you know is going through a tough time they can get help and support from [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au) or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)**



**If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.**

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