

Risk Messages Related to Children, Youth, and Schools

Communication Message(s) for Use During/After
a Threat, Hazard, or Incident

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How to Use This Message Guide

Building trust and conveying messages of hope and recovery are critical to the emotional well-being of persons affected by emergencies and other incidents.

This document serves as a toolkit with templates to achieve this goal; these templates can be adapted to the needs of each incident.

Within you will find several pre-developed messages. Spokespeople should practice delivering the three key messages, then work their way through the supporting points when needed. The messages may also be modified to send out via emails, text messages, and social media.

The behavioral health guidelines for communication (on page 3) serve as broad guiding principles for officials as they communicate with the public.

This is followed by a series of messages related to psychological or emotional aspects of incidents that are commonly asked by media and by people affected by the incident. Each topic is composed of three key messages and a set of three supporting statements for each key message. The message and supporting statements have been very carefully designed and ordered to help the spokesperson communicate this important information effectively using easy to understand language, short sentences, and other proven risk communication techniques.

A set of fact sheets are included at the end of the document. These can be used in conjunction with the key messages or form the basis of printed material that can be distributed as needed.

Some of the messages in this guide are meant for schools or organizations using the Standard Response Protocol (SRP).¹ Communications from schools during or after an incident will be most effective if parents / guardians have been educated in advance about school protocols.

Additional information about communicating in a crisis or incident is available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These resources are relatively general for use in any sector, not just public health.²

¹ Information about the Standard Response Protocol can be found here: <https://iloveguys.org>

² CDC Resources are available here: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc>

Behavioral Health Guidelines for Communication

BE FIRST. BE RIGHT. BE CREDIBLE. BE EMPATHETIC.

Building trust and conveying messages of hope and recovery is critical to the emotional well-being of persons affected by the disaster and the public.

Everyone's emotional well-being is affected by the messages you deliver.

Your messages should:

- Begin with a statement of empathy.
- Provide reassurance through fact-based information.
- Counter rumors.
- Encourage safe, adaptive and cooperative behavior.
- Promote self-care strategies for stress management.
- Emphasize resilience.

During a period of uncertainty and unconfirmed threat, communication should:

- Reassure
- Foster Confidence & Coping
- Promote Preparedness

During an event communication should:

- Reassure
- Foster Confidence & Coping
- Empower
- Encourage People to Reconnect

During recovery communication should:

- Foster Resilience
- Empower
- Encourage Community Cohesion
- Commemorate

References:

Missouri Department of Mental Health Office of Disaster Readiness. (2006) Disaster Communications Guidebook - Communicating in a crisis: Promoting trust, cooperation, & emotional well-being through risk communication. U.S.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials. SAMHSA Publication No. PEP19-01-01-005. Rockville, MD, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019.

Evacuation

Recommendations:

- See the Standard Response Protocol – K12 Operational Guidance for additional messaging recommendations.³
- This message is primarily for parents / guardians at the time of or immediately after Evacuation.

Key message #1:

1) [Event] has prompted an evacuation of the school.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Safety of our students is our top priority.
- b) The staff and students plan and train for [type of event].
- c) We are following our evacuation plan.

Key message #2:

2) Your child is safe.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Students [are being / have been] relocated to an evacuation site.
- b) We will remain at the evacuation location until the danger passes.
- c) We are working hard [with response agencies] to keep everyone safe.

Key message #3:

3) Be prepared to follow official instructions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Stay where you are right now.
- b) Once the [events] have been assessed, the school will notify you of next steps. You can find that information at [website]
- c) Your patience and cooperation are essential.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

³ <https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Response-Protocol.html>

Lockdown (Inside Threat)

Recommendations:

- See the Standard Response Protocol – K12 Operational Guidance for additional messaging recommendations.⁴
- This message can be used with parents / guardians, or with students / staff when implementing the Lockdown protocol.

Key message #1:

1) There is an incident at [Name] school [if possible, state what it was]

Supporting Statements:

- a) The school is in lockdown and following protocol.
- b) No one is allowed in or out of the building.
- c) Law enforcement is on scene.

Key message #2:

2) Staff and students have trained for these situations.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Students and staff are required to turn off their phones.
- b) Contacting students or staff now can place them in danger.
- c) Contact will be allowed when it is safe.

Key message #3:

3) Student safety is the top priority.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Stay where you are so responders can resolve the situation.
- b) Follow all [official / law enforcement] instructions.
- c) School officials will provide more information, including how to reunite with your child.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

⁴ <https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Response-Protocol.html>

Secure (Outside Threat)

Recommendations:

- See the Standard Response Protocol – K12 Operational Guidance for additional messaging recommendations.⁵
- This message is primarily for parents / guardians when implementing the Secure protocol.

Key message #1:

1) The school is using our Standard Response Protocol of Secure due to [name event outside school if possible].

Supporting Statements:

- a) Students are safe inside the school.
- b) All doors are locked.
- c) No one goes in or out of the building.

Key Message #2:

2) Inside the school it is business as usual.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Classes continue to be taught.
- b) Students are following their normal routine.
- c) The school will continue to monitor the situation.

Key Message #3:

3) Student safety is our top priority.

Supporting Statements:

- a) The safest place for your child is inside the school.
- b) For everyone's safety, please remain where you are.
- c) School officials will provide more information soon.

[Note: be sure school partners – response agencies, media – know the difference between Lockdown and Secure.]

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

⁵ <https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Response-Protocol.html>

Hold

Recommendations:

- See the Standard Response Protocol – K12 Operational Guidance for additional messaging recommendations.⁶
- This message can be used with parents / guardians, or with students / staff when implementing the Hold protocol.
- Schools should notify staff that Hold is being implemented
- Teachers and staff then read the Hold message to students
 - This message is shared with parents / guardians at the same time.

Key Message #1:

1) The school is using our Standard Response Protocol of Hold due to [insert nature of incident].

Supporting Statements:

- a) We have implemented Hold to ensure the safety of everyone inside the school.
- b) The staff and students drill for [type of incident].
- c) We are following our plan.

By using a HOLD response, this allows schools to notify their staff, who then reads the same message to students, who then tell their parents the same message. This helps to eliminate the RUMORS....of course this is a method to be used during school

Key Message #2:

2) We will maintaining as normal a routine as possible given the situation.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Stay where you are so responders can resolve the situation.
- b) Staff are with your children.
- c) Safety is our top priority.

Key Message #3:

3) Students will remain in their classrooms or other safe areas until the Hold is released.

Supporting Statements:

- a) After the Hold is released, students will be free to move about the school.
- b) Watch for updates [insert information on where updates will be provided].
- c) You will receive another notification when Hold is over.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

⁶ <https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Response-Protocol.html>

Shelter

Recommendations:

- See the Standard Response Protocol – K12 Operational Guidance for additional messaging recommendations.⁷
- This message is primarily for parents / guardians when implementing the Shelter protocol.

Key Message #1:

1) Staff and students are sheltering at [name school] due to [event].

Supporting Statements:

- a) Safety is our top priority.
- b) The staff and students drill for [type of event].
- c) We are following our Shelter plan.

Key Message #2:

2) Your child is sheltered and safe.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We will remain sheltered until the danger passes.
- b) Staff are with your children.
- c) We are working to keep everyone safe.

Key Message #3:

3) Please keep yourself safe.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Stay current on official information.
- b) Follow the advice of authorities.
- d) You will receive another notification when Shelter is over.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

⁷ <https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Response-Protocol.html>

Student/Family Reunification

Key Message #1:

1) A student / parent reunification process is underway due to [incident / event] at school [state briefly, if you can].

Supporting Statements:

- a) Please go to [location] to be reunited with your child.
- b) This process protects the safety of students.
- c) We plan and train for reunification.

Key Message #2:

2) Be patient, the reunification process takes time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) When you arrive, please check in and follow instructions.
- b) Your child will be supervised at [location] until reunited.
- c) We will reunite students and families as quickly as possible.

Key Message #3:

3) The school is following our standard reunification process.

[Note: Each school district may have a different process to verify identity - modify supporting statements to describe your process.]

Supporting Statements:

[Insert school's reunification process key points below in a & b – examples provided]

- a) [You will be asked to show your ID and fill out a reunification card for each child.]
- b) [Children may be released to your pre-designated emergency contact on record with the school.]
- c) Your patience is appreciated.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Drills and Students with Functional Needs

Including Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) or Early Onset Serious Mental Illness (ESMI)

Recommendations:

- Parents / guardians should be informed prior to every drill what is to take place and being practiced.

Key Message #1:

1) The school is having a drill for [insert drill] on [date].

Supporting Statements:

- a) Drills are important so students and staff know what to do if [insert drill topic] happens.
- b) Some students may experience distress during or after the drill.
- c) Most students will be fine.

Key Message #2:

2) We understand some students have unique sensory needs.

Supporting Statements:

- a) If your child has specific needs, please inform the school.
- b) Drills are intended to help students and staff feel safe.
- c) Staff can assist students who need accommodations to participate in the drill.⁸

Key Message #3:

Ask your child if they would like to talk about the drill; let their answer guide you.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Let your child know the school does drills throughout the year to help keep them safe.
- b) Make connections to safety habits you already practice, like wearing seatbelts in the car.
- c) Allow your child to talk about their concerns, or to just spend time with you.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

⁸ Accommodation resources/options may include ear protectors, strollers/wagons, buddy system, etc.

Telling Children About the Event

Key Message #1:

1) The age of the child should guide how much and the type of information you share about the event.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Give information at a level the child can understand.
- b) Give younger children fewer details about the disaster.
- c) Children of all ages need comfort and attention from the adults in their lives after events like this

Key Message #2:

2) Be honest when talking to children.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Give children just enough information to answer their questions.
- b) Sometimes being honest means admitting you don't know the answer.
- c) Tell children there are people working to make them safe.

Key Message #3:

3) Listen to the child's questions and answer them.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Let children know it's ok to talk about how they feel.
- b) Some children may ask the same question over and over.
- c) Let children ask questions freely and give simple answers.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

References:

Psychosocial Issues for Children and Families in Disasters: A Guide for the Primary Care Physician. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Washington D.C., 1995.

Talking about Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages. National Disaster Education Coalition. July 2004.

Schlichtemeir-Nutzman, S. Help in the Aftermath: Post-disaster Resources. Nebraska Department of Public Institutions and Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 1995.

Children's Reactions to a Critical Event

Key Message #1:

1) Adults and children have a variety of reactions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children may be scared, worried, distracted, have sleep problems, or feel sick.
- b) Children might act younger than their age.
- c) Everyone reacts in their own way.

Brief Message / Text

Kids have a variety of reactions after disasters. Some may need extra help - most will be fine with support from family & friends.

Key Message #2:

2) Some children may need additional support.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children feel more secure with structure and routine.
- b) Keep in touch with your child's teacher or school counselor.
- c) Talk to your doctor if you're concerned about a child's reaction.

Key Message #3:

3) There are several things you can do to help your children.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Make sure your children get plenty of sleep.
- b) Answer questions simply and honestly at an age-appropriate level.
- c) Information that is acceptable for adults may upset and confuse a child.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

References:

Recovery: After a Tornado. (n.d) National Child Traumatic Stress Network. 10 August 2006. http://www.ncatsn.org/ncats/nav.do?pid=typ_nd_torn_recovery&disasterType=torn&navPid=typ_nd_torn_desc.

Speier, Anthony. *Psychosocial Issues for Children and Adolescents in Disaster*. 2nd ed. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Mental Health Services. Washington D.C., 2000

Vernberg, Eric M, et al. Prediction of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Children after Hurricane Andrew. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. 105.2 (1996): 237-248.

Exposing Children to Media About the Event

Key Message #1:

1) Talk with children about what they see and hear about the event.

Supporting Statements:

- a) The age (and maturity) of the child should guide how much and the type of information you share about the event.
- b) Give younger children fewer details about the event.
- c) Listen to the child's questions and answer them.

Key Message #2:

2) Adults and children have a variety of reactions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children may be scared, worried, upset, have sleep problems, or feel sick.
- b) Younger children may believe an event is happening again if they see it repeated on TV.
- c) Children learn from adults how to react to the disaster.

Key Message #3:

3) Most children will be fine with support from family and friends.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children of all ages need comfort and attention from the adults in their lives after events like this.
- b) Limiting children's exposure to media may lessen everyone's stress.
- c) Talk to a professional if you're concerned about a child's reaction.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Children's Questions About Perpetrators

Note: This message is particularly pertinent after a human-caused incident with high public outrage. Consider being proactive in releasing this message.

Key Message #1:

1) It's always difficult to understand why people make these choices.

Supporting Statements:

- a) This is a question that everyone is asking.
- b) We may never really know why.
- c) It is common to try to make sense out of a senseless act.

Key Message #2:

2) You will hear many opinions about why this happened.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be skeptical about what you may hear.
- b) Much of what you hear will be opinions rather than facts.
- c) Limiting exposure to these opinions may lessen your stress.

Key Message #3:

3) We are working to find out more.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We are working with other agencies involved in this situation.
- b) and focusing on the facts.
- c) We are working to provide support to those impacted.
- d) We want to use what we learn to prevent this in the future.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Anxiety & Stress After a Critical Event

Key Message #1:

1) Take care of your emotional and spiritual needs.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It's common to feel anxious or worried.
- b) Try to reduce your workload and regular responsibilities.
- c) Stay in contact with friends, family, and spiritual support.

Key Message #2:

2) Good physical health improves your outlook.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise.
- b) Avoid using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco to cope.
- c) Keep a regular schedule to lessen worry and anxiety.

Key Message #3:

[For natural disaster or a public health emergency]

3) Prepare as you would for any emergency.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Make a list of healthy ways to take care of your mind and body.
- b) Stay informed about [insert event].
- c) Keep extra food, water, medicines, and household goods on hand.

[For terrorism/shooting; can also be used for other events]

4) Take things one day at a time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Focus on things you can control.
- b) Helping someone else can help you feel better.
- c) Do something you enjoy.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Brief Message

Take care of emotional & spiritual needs. Good health improves your outlook. Prepare as you would for any emergency.

References:

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/mass-shooting.aspx>

Expect Strong Emotions After an Event

Key Message #1:

1) People may be surprised by intense and changing emotions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Fear, anger, guilt, and sadness are common feelings after an event like this.
- b) You may also notice those emotions in others.
- c) Be patient with yourself and your loved ones.

Key Message #2:

2) Take care of yourself during this stressful time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Get plenty of rest.
- b) Take time for yourself.
- c) Talk to someone if you're feeling overwhelmed.

Key Message #3:

3) We will get through this by supporting each other.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Focus on things you can control.
- b) Be available to help others when you can.
- c) Accept help when it is offered.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Brief message

Fear, anger, guilt & sadness are common after an event. Take care of yourself. Talk to someone if you're overwhelmed.

Some Reactions May Need Additional Support

[Note: This is for all parents, noting that first episode psychosis may occur for some children after an event at school.]

Key Message #1:

1) Disasters or emergencies can be a source of trauma for some youth.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Trauma can result from an event experienced as physically or emotionally harmful.
- b) Some studies have linked trauma and psychosis in young people.
- c) Trauma can have lasting effects on the functioning and well-being of youth.

Key Message #2:

2) People react differently to disasters.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Fear, anger, guilt, and sadness are common feelings after an event like this.
- b) Substance use can make reactions worse.
- c) Reactions that last for a long time, or unusual reactions like hallucinations, need professional help.

Key Message #3:

3) Talk with your child if they are not getting better or are experiencing delusions or hallucinations.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Tell your child what you have noticed about their behavior in a quiet and peaceful location.
- b) Keep in mind that if your child's experience is very real to them.
- c) Tell your child you would like them to speak with a professional or doctor so they can start feeling better.
- d) Get support from parents with similar experiences.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Parenting When You Are Struggling

[Note: This is for all parents, some of whom may have their own strong reactions to the event, or pre-existing mental health issues.]

Key Message #1:

1) You may be surprised by intense and changing emotions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Fear, anger, guilt, and sadness are common feelings after an event like this.
- b) You may also notice these emotions in others.
- c) Be patient with yourself and others.

Key Message #2:

2) Be sure to take care of yourself while you are caring for your child.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Get plenty of rest.
- b) Spend time with your child.
- c) Follow your regular routine.

Key Message #3:

3) Get help when you need it.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Focus on things you can control.
- b) Everyone reacts in their own way.
- c) Talk with a professional if you are concerned about your reactions.
- d) Add a list/links for local resources.

Suicide Prevention

Note: The topic of suicide prevention should be addressed openly to encourage people to get the help they need.

Key Message #1:

1) Many suicides can be prevented.

Supporting Statements:

- a) The number one cause of suicide is untreated depression.
- b) Depression is treatable.
- c) Help is available.

Key Message #2:

2) Know the warning signs.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide.
- b) Looking for ways to hurt or kill themselves.
- c) Feeling hopeless or helpless.

Key Message #3:

3) Know what to do and act.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Directly ask, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- b) Listen, offer hope, and get help.
- c) Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

References:

NDE toolkits for suicide prevention and postvention:
<https://www.education.ne.gov/safety/suicide-prevention>

Death of a Student, Staff Member, or School Volunteer

Recommendations:

- Schools: Activate the crisis or psychological first aid team.
- Coordinate with the family about any details they want shared.
- Inform staff and teachers first, preferably in person.
- Have teachers all read the same message in class at the same time (for high school students).
- Notify parents at the same time with the same message you give to students.
 - Share Fact Sheets for:
 - Children's Reactions
 - Talking with Children About Death

Your message to staff, students, and parents may look like this:

Key Message #1:

1) We are saddened to inform you that [Insert name] [insert relationship to school] has died.

Supporting Statements: [as approved by family]

- a) The family would like privacy at this time.
- OR The family would like us to share this information with you.
- b) and c) [Add any information the family would like to share, such as plans for a memorial service, cause of death, how they would like their loved one to be remembered.]

Key Message #2:

2) You may have intense and changing feelings about this.

- a) Sadness, anger, guilt, and fear are common feelings after a death.
- b) You may notice these emotions in others.
- c) Be patient with yourself and others.

Key Message #3:

3) Counselors are available to support students and staff.

Supporting Statements:

- a) You can reach counselors by [insert process].
- b) Support is available.
- c) You may also reach out to these resources for support [insert list of resources].

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Rumors

Key Message #1:

1) Stay current on official information.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be calm and follow the advice of local authorities.
- b) Check the facts.
- c) Pay attention to official sources.

Key Message #2:

2) Professionals are working to resolve the situation.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Responders are trained to handle a variety of situations.
- b) They are taking actions according to plans.
 - a. Responders are prepared for an event like this.

[Note: An alternate version of c), or an answer to a question, could be:]

- c) I have confidence in the people working on this situation.

Key Message #3:

3) There are several things you can do.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Share the facts with people you know.
- b) Follow directions from local officials.
- c) Be ready to help when asked.

Brief message

Get the facts at: [website and/or Facebook page]

OR

Follow directions:
[website and/or
Facebook page]

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Understanding Media Coverage of the Event

Key Message #1:

1) Be thoughtful about what you see and hear about the [event].

Supporting Statements:

- a) It can take time to confirm facts.
- b) Avoid repeating rumors.
- c) Get the facts from official sources.

Key Message #2:

2) Information on social media could affect your reactions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Many sources exist on social media.
- b) Official sources must verify information before sharing it.
- c) Avoid reacting to rumors.

Key Message #3:

3) Most people will be fine with support from family and friends.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Limiting exposure to media may reduce everyone's stress.
- b) Trained professionals can help if you are overwhelmed.
- c) Rely on and support those around you.

[Add who parents/guardians can contact at end of every message]

Fact Sheets

The following pages contain brief, one-page fact sheets that can be customized with your contact information and used as handouts or additional information for media in a press release.

Review the content and customize it for the critical event or disaster situation in your community. Add contact information or helpline numbers to the fact sheet as appropriate.

References are included to ensure your readers that the information is obtained from valid sources. You may opt to delete the references if you require additional space for hotline numbers or local resources.

Children's Reactions

Children may display a variety of **emotional reactions after an event**. It is very common to be distracted, frightened, insecure, or upset about what happened.

How a parent reacts will make a difference in the child's understanding and recovery after the disaster. Parents should observe, listen and answer questions about what is happening and explain in terms their child can understand.

Consider talking with the child's physician or a mental health professional if their emotional reactions concern you.

The following list includes some of the **common reactions** children may have to the event:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| ⑩ Inability to concentrate | ⑩ Crying/Depression |
| ⑩ Withdrawal from others | ⑩ Bedwetting |
| ⑩ Not wanting to attend school | ⑩ Thumb sucking |
| ⑩ Headaches / Stomach aches | ⑩ Nightmares |
| ⑩ Changes in eating and sleeping habits | ⑩ Clinging/fear of being left alone |
| ⑩ Excessive fear of darkness | ⑩ Arguing |
| ⑩ Increase in physical complaints | |

These are **things parents or caregivers can do to help children**:

- Hug your child often.
- Reassure your child frequently that you are safe and together.
- Talk with your child about his/her feelings. Let them know it is OK to feel the way they do.
- Talk about what happened. Provide information the child can understand.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep. Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- Help children feel more secure by providing structure and routine.
- Maintain normal daily tasks and activities.
- Allow children to grieve about their lost treasures: a toy, a blanket, or a lost home.
- Encourage children to keep in touch with friends and family.
- Spend extra time together to begin replacing fears with pleasant memories.

References:

For more information: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-survivors>

How to Talk with Children After a Critical Event

Note to Parents:

- Make sure you take care of your own physical and psychological needs so that you can attend to your child's needs.

A common misconception is that children will be frightened if you talk to them about what is going on. Children are usually more frightened if you whisper about it and avoid talking to them.

How to start talking:

- Give your children direct, undivided attention and let them know you want to listen and help them.
- Let your children ask questions freely and give them simple concrete answers at an age-appropriate level.

How to listen and show you understand:

- Listen carefully to what they say, don't jump to conclusions, and repeat back to them what you heard them say.
- Accept a child's perceptions. Avoid simply telling them to stop feeling the way they are. Talk about what makes them feel the way they do and what you can do to help.
- Take a break occasionally from talk and activities related to the disaster.

References:

You can find additional information for parents at:

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters>

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/children-disaster-help.html>

Talking with Children about Death

Here are some simple guidelines that may help families talk to children about the death of a person or pet known or loved by the child.

- **Tell the truth as gently as you can.**

Example, “Grandpa died. He’s not coming back, but we will always remember him.”

DON’T: Confuse your child with vague phrases such as “passed away” or “no longer with us.”

- **Share your grief.**

Example, “I’m very sad. How are you feeling about this?”

DON’T: Hide your grief and send the message to your child that they should do the same.

- **Comfort your child.**

Example, “Death is a part of life.” Ease your child’s fears of the unknown. Talk about your spiritual beliefs.

- **Deal with your child’s emotions.**

Example, “Let’s talk about what you are feeling.”

DON’T: Tell your child to stop feeling something without explanation.

- **Encourage your child to attend memorial services or commemorate the loved one that they lost as appropriate.**

Example: “Would you like to go to the funeral/memorial service?”

DON’T: Force your child to go.

National and Statewide Resources

National and state resources exist to assist families with children or caregivers who could benefit from behavioral health support. Additional resources may be available in your local area.

- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (24/7)** – Call or text 988
Chat available through the 988 website: <https://988lifeline.org>
- **Nebraska Family Helpline** – call toll-free 888-866-8660
More information about the helpline is available through the DHHS website:
<https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Nebraska-Family-Helpine-About.aspx>
- **Nebraska Network of Care**
Search services in your area on this web page:
<https://portal.networkofcare.org/NebraskaBehavioralHealth>
- **Safe2Help NE**
Safe2Help is a report system designed for students, staff, and parents to anonymously report concerning behavior which could impact the safety of students or schools across Nebraska. Reports may include but are not limited to: School Threats, Bullying/Cyberbullying, Suicide Concern, Crime.

To make a report, visit the website at [Safe2HelpNE.org](https://www.safe2helpne.org), download the app on either Android or Apple phone, or call 833-980-SAFE (7233) to submit a report 24/7/365.

The Nebraska Department of Education provides additional information about Safe2Help at: <https://www.education.ne.gov/safety/safe2help-faq>

- **Nebraska Department of Education**
The Nebraska Department of Education maintains a toolkit and other resources for suicide prevention and postvention planning at:
<https://www.education.ne.gov/safety/suicide-prevention>