

## Helping someone who is grieving

### Be a good listener

Grieving people need to talk about their loss, acknowledge that they have been through a difficult experience. You can't fix their grief but you can be there, hear their story, and share their journey.

### Be a shoulder to cry on

Allow them to cry with you, crying helps the release of emotions and this helps with healing.

### Be in touch with them

Drop in, call on the telephone and say "I was thinking of you today", write a letter, send an email, remember special days like Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries.

When someone has experienced a loss, there will be big and small adjustments to be made in their lives. These could bring uncertainty, frustration, fear, sadness and change as each new day comes along. Grief is about adapting to change in life, thoughts, hopes, beliefs and the future.

### Be a friend

Often being there is all that is needed to support someone who is grieving.

(Adapted from the writings of Doris Zagdanski)

## Contact Us

### Head Office:

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### Telephone Grief Support Line

**Call 02 9489 6644\*** (\*Call costs will apply)

### NALAG Centres & Branches (NSW)

**NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief DUBBO**  
(Same as Head Office)

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*Helping Childre after a Tradgedy Version 1.0 of 2018*

# Helping children after a tradgedy

## Tips for helping children after a tragedy

Tragedies like the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut and other incidents has evoked sadness, grief, anxiety, and anger. Children who are struggling with their thoughts and feelings of the shooting may turn to trusted adults for help and guidance. NALAG offers these suggestions as you talk to your child:

- **Limit media exposure.** Limit your child's exposure to media images and sounds of the shooting and other traumatic events. Do not allow very young children to see or hear any TV/radio trauma-related messages. Even if they appear to be engrossed in play, children often are aware of what you are watching on TV or listening to on the radio. What may not be upsetting to an adult may be very upsetting and confusing for a child. Limit your own exposure as well. Adults may become more distressed with nonstop exposure to media coverage of this shooting.
- **What does your child already know?** Start by asking what your child already has heard about the event from the media and from friends. Listen carefully; try to figure out what he or she knows or believes. As your child explains, listen for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns. Understand that this information will change as more facts about the event are known.
- **Gently correct inaccurate information.** If your child/teen has inaccurate information or misconceptions, take time to provide the correct information in simple, clear, age-appropriate language.

- **Encourage your child to ask questions, and answer those questions directly.** Your child/teen may have some difficult questions about the incident. For example, he/she may ask if it is possible that it could happen at their school/town/home etc he/she is probably really asking whether it is "likely." The concern about re-occurrence will be an issue for caregivers and children/teens alike. While it is important to discuss the likelihood of this risk, she/he is also asking if she/he is safe.
- **Be patient.** In times of stress, children may have trouble with their behaviour, concentration, and attention. While they may not openly ask for your guidance or support, they will want it. Children need a little extra patience, care, and love. (Be patient with yourself, too!).

### Signs a Child Might Not Be Coping Well

Some of things to look for are:

- **Sleep problems:** Watch for trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, difficulty waking, nightmares, or other sleep disturbances.
- **Physical complaints:** Children may complain of feeling tired, having a headache, or generally feeling unwell. You may notice your child eating too much or less than usual.
- **Changes in behavior:** Look for signs of regressive behavior, including social regression, acting more immature, or becoming less patient and more demanding. A child who once separated easily from her parents may become clingy. Teens may begin or change current patterns of tobacco, alcohol, or substance use.
- **Emotional problems:** Children may experience

undue sadness, depression, anxiety, or fears.

- Sometimes it can be hard to tell if a child is reacting in a typical way to an unusual event or whether they are having real problems coping, and might need extra support. If you are concerned, talk to your child's pediatrician or a mental health professional or counselor.

### What helps

- Don't wait for the signs. Start the discussion early, and keep the dialogue going.
- Let the child know she/he is safe and protected
- Explain the tragedy in an age appropriate way
- Get back to household routine as soon as possible
- Talk about worries and fears
- Hugs are always helpful
- Talk about bad dreams
- Talk about feelings – and help the child process them
- Allow the child to attend ceremonies (if appropriate)
- Allow the child to attend a funeral if he/she wants

Adapted from information provided by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

### Additional information and resources are available from:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)
- Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss and Grief Network
- [www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au](http://www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au)