



## Tips for Primary Teachers when Discussing Traumatic World Events

When discussing traumatic world events with students, it is important to remember children will have a wide range of responses to and understanding of the situation. Some may not appear to be affected at all, while others may be highly impacted. If you feel that only a few students are impacted, it is more effective to have one-to-one conversations as opposed to a full class discussion.



### KEY POINTS

- Provide simple age-appropriate facts
- Acknowledge all feelings
- Provide hope



### MODEL CALM

- It is important that adults model a sense of calm and security
- Students will take their cues from us. If we are calm and hopeful, it will be easier for them to be too
- Class discussions should be brief: students trust adults to tell them the truth and to provide developmentally appropriate information



### START BY LISTENING

- Listen for the tone of their free play and the words they are using. If you notice that the class has questions or concerns, it is okay to have a class discussion. Individual conversations are also effective (same steps – smaller scale)
- Start by asking how students are doing and listen carefully to what they say
- We can't assume we know what students are thinking and feeling. What they are actually thinking and feeling might surprise us
- Ask open-ended questions like the following:
  - » Tell me what you know.
  - » Where did you first hear about this?
  - » How are you feeling?
  - » What else are you wondering?
- Watch for signs of fear and anxiety that students may not be able to put into words. For example, changes in normal behaviour or functioning



### PROVIDE FACTUAL INFORMATION

- Give students brief answers with basic facts that are developmentally appropriate
- Ask students what they already know so you can correct any misinformation they may have heard
- Keep the information simple. Dwelling on the situation or details can increase fear and anxiety
- You don't have to have all the answers. A simple reply with *"I'm not sure about that"* can give you time to reflect or do some research
- Avoid exposure to media, images, and articles in the classroom



## VALIDATE AND NORMALIZE

- Let students know you heard their concerns. (E.g. *“Sounds like you are feeling worried.” “I hear you when you say you are scared.”*)
- Address their fear: remind students that they are safe right now. Let them know that the adults in their lives will continue to do their job of keeping them safe
- Let students know that what they are feeling is OK and normal under the circumstances. (E.g. *“It makes sense that you would be worried right now. Lots of people would react that way in this situation.”*)



## ENCOURAGE EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

- Remind children there may be others who are impacted by this situation
- Encourage children to be kind and gentle with others and to empathize with people who have other backgrounds and experiences



## MAINTAIN NORMAL ROUTINE

- Structure and normalcy during stressful times and unusual circumstances is very important for students
- Acknowledge the situation and then get on with the normal activities of the day



## ACCESS SUPPORTS WHEN NEEDED

If you have any students who are in a high state of distress and have trouble functioning in their regular activities at school, please consider accessing the following supports:

- School counsellor
- ELL teacher, International Education department, SWIS worker
- Community counselling supports
- <https://keltymentalhealth.ca/>
- <https://www.anxietycanada.com/>
- <https://cmha.ca/>

