

Supporting a child who has experienced a traumatic event can be stressful for parents/carers. Friends and relatives can be very helpful to both adults and children at such times.

The support given, both at home and at school, will generally help to ensure that the reactions to the event are temporary. Although the event will never be forgotten, most children will recover without serious long-term effects. However, if you continue to have concerns about your child's reactions, you may wish to consider further support.

### Useful contacts/People who may be able to help:

- Your GP
- Your local religious community
- Your child's teacher
- The school nurse
- Voluntary Counselling agencies
- The school psychologist
- Cruse - Bereavement Care: 31 St George's Road, Cheltenham 01242 252518
- MIND: Info line Mon-Friday 9.15 am—4.45 p.m.  
Tel: 0845 766 0163  
Website: [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)
- Winstons Wish: Winston's Wish, Westmoreland House, 80-86 Bath Road, Cheltenham, GL53 7JT  
Tel: 01242 515157  
Website: [winstonswish.org.uk](http://winstonswish.org.uk)

Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service  
28th October 2002



Gloucestershire  
Educational  
Psychology Service

## Coping with a Traumatic Event

### Guidance for Parents/Carers

#### How you can help your child



This leaflet is for parents/carers whose children have been involved in a sudden, unexpected and distressing event related to school. It includes examples of possible reactions that your child might experience; ways your child might be helped and a list of useful contacts.

## Possible Reactions to a traumatic event



Following any distressing event it is quite normal to experience a range of reactions. Each person will respond in her/his own way. Your child may show **some** of the following:

- Not being able to concentrate or want to do school work or make decisions
- Sudden flashbacks which can be caused by related sights, sounds or smells
- Avoiding places, people or objects which remind them of the incident
- Physical effects such as feeling unwell, headaches, listlessness or over activity
- Nightmares, bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, irritability
- Difficulty in accepting the events or how they have been affected by them e.g. appearing over-brave
- Changes in personality e.g. feeling depressed or isolated, becoming irritable or angry
- Needing to go over and over the incident which can test the patience of those closest
- Seeing or hearing the person who has died.

These reactions are all perfectly normal responses and are usually short-lived. The majority of people will get over the experience with the support of family, friends and school.

### Ways your child may be helped:

A traumatic event often leaves children feeling confused and unsettled, it is therefore very important to keep routines as normal as possible, both at home and at school.



#### At School

To help your child, teachers may set less demanding work or less homework. If several children have been involved in an incident, it is likely that school will give them to opportunity to share their experiences as part of coming to terms with what has happened. This type of session would be led by one of the teachers who may be supported by the **Educational Psychologist** for the school.



#### At Home

To help your child you may find some of the following ideas helpful:

## HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD

- Listen to and try to understand your child's view of the event
- Give attention, reassurance and physical contact
- Allow your child to talk about the experience and express his/her feelings
- Check your child's understanding of the event
- Answer your child's questions as truthfully as possible
- Respect privacy - do not force your child to talk if s/he does not want to
- Maintain daily routines
- Encourage healthy eating, exercise and rest
- Comforting bed-time routines may be particularly helpful
- Encourage resumption of social activities e.g. clubs
- Let your child know that their feelings are quite normal and whilst the incident may always be an unpleasant memory they will feel better in time
- Think of some of the positive things that have happened e.g. being brave, finding someone to be very kind.