



# WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

Dealing with children (over 12 years)

After a terrible event, children may have different kinds of ideas or feelings. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Being around family & friends, they may feel happy or safe. Other times, they might feel sad, scared, or angry.



**A crisis can affect how they feel, how they think, and how they act. For example:**

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- Fear
- Anger at others or self
- Guilt e.g., that they did not try to help their friends
- Sadness e.g., at having lost close friends
- Withdrawing, keeping away from friends & family
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- Difficulty with concentration
- Shock
- Body aches and pains
- Repeatedly thinking about or experiencing images of what happened
- Making radical life decisions about their future

*All children react differently. Some will exhibit behavior change immediately and others not until a few weeks later. Most will recover in a few weeks.*

**What should parents do?**

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- Try and reestablish family routines as much as possible.
- Encourage them to return to school as soon as possible.
- Encourage them to eat well, get enough sleep and exercise.
- Spend time with them and listen and try to understand their feelings.
- Even if it is difficult, it is important to do some fun things as a family like playing carom or watching a movie.
- Children find comfort in saying dua or praying together as a family but do not force them.
- Stay calm during their anger outbursts. Later talk to them about it and how it represents their feeling about the trauma.
- In case there are arguments between family members, help them to accept that different family members may have different feelings and reactions to the event.

- If you find yourself being more protective and restrictive, explain to your child that it is temporary precaution.
- Support them if they want to participate in actions to support or honor the victims.
- Watch out for behaviors like smoking or taking extra risks. Talk calmly and explain that these may be reactions to the trauma but are still dangerous and harmful.
- Beware that watching too much of TV especially regarding the traumatic event is not helpful.
- Take care of yourself and be aware of your own feelings and reactions to the trauma. Seek support if you need to.

### **How to talk to your child?**

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It is important to talk to your child:

- Start the topic but don't force them to talk.
- **Listen** and encourage them to explain their feelings and concerns.
- If they feel helpless, encourage them about what people are doing to provide security.
- If they want to make major decisions, tell them you understand but it is good to take one day at a time for now.
- If they talk about their guilt, reassure them what happened to their friends is not their fault.
- Discuss how these feelings are normal and will improve with time. Share your own feelings and concerns.
- Stay calm yourself.
- Try to share stories of support and goodness that people have demonstrated after a disaster.

### **When to seek help for your child?**

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When you notice that:

- Their problems continue for 2-3 months after the trauma.
- They have persistent worry about their own and other's safety.
- They repeatedly say that they want to die.
- There is a change in their school performance or attendance.
- They have reduced interest in friends.
- There is risky or impulsive behaviors like fast driving or smoking.



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**This brochure has been prepared by senior mental health professionals  
and is free for printing and distributing anywhere in the country.**

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