



Parenting During a Time of Uncertainty

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILDREN

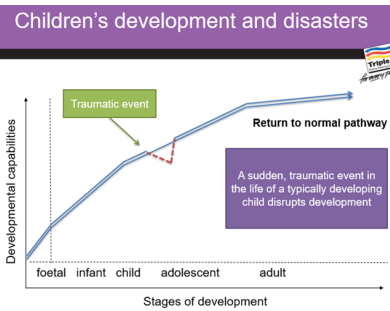
Times of uncertainty are a part of our world - We are facing a time of uncertainty and living each moment waiting for the latest information and direction.

What can we expect?

- It is common for children of all ages to be distressed.
- A child's reaction to an event depends on their age and stage of development.
- Not all children experience distress.
- Most children who do experience distress will recover naturally without extra help



Single incident trauma & development



- Children get better at things over time. For instance, they get better at walking, at talking and at playing as they grow.
- This is considered a single incident trauma, a one-off event that is potentially very frightening and overwhelming. A single incident trauma has good chance of “knocking” children off their normal developmental path or trajectory. Fortunately, the majority of children who experience this kind of effect will return to their normal trajectory with time and support from their parents. They will experience what we refer to as a natural recovery.

• A single event includes several distinct phases:

1. The anxiety beforehand when people knew something could happen. People may be busy planning and asking questions.
2. The event itself and waiting to see how bad it will be. Possibly making changes to usual daily processes.
3. The “clean up”
4. The after-effects. These include things like financial pressure and relationship stress, as well as other practical issues. Many of these after-effects are seen later and will continue into the future.

Common emotional & behavioural actions

- Behaving younger than you would expect
- Clinginess and difficulty separating
- Sleep disturbances
- Increased irritability and anger
- Flashbacks to the event
- A sense of danger
- Specific fears related to the incident
- Avoidance of activities
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sadness
- Upset for no apparent reason

Natural Course of Children's Response

- Children often experience distress following a traumatic experience (days/weeks)
- Most children will return to their pre-event pattern within 3 months
- Different children will be on different ‘recovery timetables’ (even within the same family)
- Some children may experience an increase in distress in the next few months as the family is faced with extra stress (e.g. financial burden)



FIRST YEARS NETWORK
Lamont County Region

For more information, please contact
(780) 895-2233 ext 244
Or toll free @ 1-877-895-2233 ext 244



Predictable triggers for stress after the event

Once children have returned to their pre-distress pattern, there are some common triggers for distress that can occur later on:



Weather related triggers



Subsequent events that may cause concern



Media images



Birthdays & anniversaries of the deaths of loved ones



1-year anniversary of event

Why are some children more affected than others?

- **What children bring to the event** - Experience of a past traumatic event and existing emotional and/or behavioral problems
- What children experience during the event:
 - ⇒ Greater exposure
 - ⇒ Child's fear and perception of threat
 - ⇒ Extent of loss
- How others respond:
 - ⇒ Exposure to frightening information
 - ⇒ Over-protection and extreme adult anxiety can encourage the belief that the world is a dangerous place



POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. After a traumatic event, both parents and children can be incredibly resilient
2. Even resilient people can experience difficulties
3. Ask for help

Parenting traps - Being a parent is the hardest job there is.

A parent trap is often simply "too much" of something that can be helpful, or is in fact necessary. We can fall into parenting traps and, when we do, it's generally because:

- We are trying to do what we think is best for our children
- We are frightened ourselves
- We don't know what else to do

Children learn a great deal about safety and threat in their world from their parents and other family members but we must remember that parenting traps can delay a child's natural recovery.

4 types of parenting traps:

1

Encouraging too much talk about the event

- Too much attention to children's fears and distress can be unhelpful
- It can send a scary message to children – mom and dad are still worried. There is something to be worried about
- Ok within limits - talking about the event can become a way for children to gain special time with a parent

2

Discouraging all talk

- Parents sometimes do this after a traumatic event because they think that it will help the family get back to normal more quickly
- Discouraging all talk can also give children scare messages:
 - Mom/dad is still too upset to even be able to talk about it
 - There is something wrong with me (if I haven't gotten over it)

3

Being very protective

- When parents are very protective long after the danger has passed, this tells children that there is still something to worry about
- Children can believe the danger is current

4

Talking to children about your own fears and distress

- Many parents are distressed themselves
- It can become something else for children to worry about
- Most children cannot resolve parents' worries and shouldn't have to
- Is OK within limits
- Sharing our concerns demonstrates that it is normal to feel scared and upset after an event



Children need to learn that:

1. Their parents are coping otherwise it is hard for them to feel safe
2. Although dangerous things can happen, the world is not always a dangerous place
3. Their family is safe

Managing children's emotions & behaviours

During event:

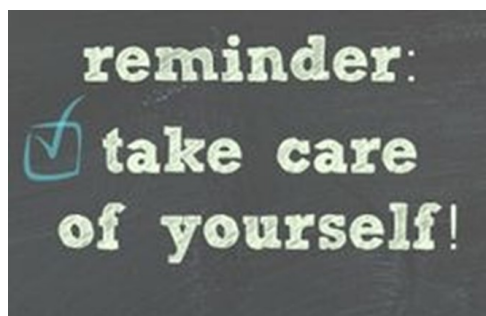
- Set an example of calm communication
- Allow your child to be upset
- Follow your child's lead:
 - ⇒ For older children, ask your child to talk about why they are upset - put limits around these conversations
 - ⇒ For younger children, provide a scrapbook for them to draw in - again put limits around activity
- Encourage children to use their coping skills - this will encourage a sense of mastery and control
- Give attention and rewards for settled, non-distressed behaviour
- Stick to the fact of what happened

After event:

- Make it clear that the danger is over/controlled now
- Show your children by example that you do not believe there is present danger
- Reassure children that being upset after the event is normal
- Let your child know that you have confidence in their ability to manage their distress, and that you are available to help them do this
- Return to pre-event parenting styles – conveys predictability and a sense of 'normality'
- Re-establish as many of your family's normal daily routines as possible
- Remind your children that the entire community is working hard on getting back to normal as soon as possible
- Encourage your child to notice signs of the community's "new normal"

Other things that can help

- Take care of yourself – both for your own sake and because your children need you to show them how to cope in a helpful way:
 - ⇒ Use your support system (family and friends)
 - ⇒ Seek external help as needed around these conversations (sets a good example of coping)
- Limit children's exposure to media coverage of the event
- Have a family plan (fire, storm, flood, etc. – as appropriate). Involve your children (e.g. ask them to help make up the emergency kit). Remember to be reasonable



Answering children's questions - some guidelines

Children's fears and worries about the event are often conveyed through the questions they ask. These questions can be hard to answer for parents. Here are some general guidelines for how to respond to children's questions:

- Answer truthfully. It is generally better to be direct and honest even if the answer is painful.
- Give children your full attention and listen carefully to what the child is asking about.
- Avoid providing too much information.
- If you do not know the answer, offer to find out. Talk to your children about reputable sources (learning opportunity!)
- Clarify the child's version of the truth. Sometimes their imaginings are even more frightening than the reality. Have peers or an unreliable source told them other information that is frightening?

The TOUGH questions - Am I going to die? Is our house safe? Why are people in danger/dying? ...& more

Key points to communicate:

- Think about the past few days. There has been no danger.
- Think about the present. There is no current threat if we follow recommendations.
- Think about how mom and dad are acting. It's our job to keep you safe and we're not frightened. We will do what will keep us safe.
- In almost all cases, we get warnings before anything happens.
- We have a family plan.



What's next?

If you have tried these strategies and are still worried 3 months post-event, seek professional help. Talk with your general practitioner (doctor).

For the small number of children who do not recover naturally, psychological help is useful. Trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy helps children manage their frightening memories, overcome avoidance and be less fearful.

Contact your local Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and Family Resource Networks for further connection to services in your area: **Lamont County Region: 1-780-895-2233 or toll-free 1-877-895-2233**



Healthy families...
competent children,
strong communities

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- After an event, children can experience a range of emotions and behaviours
- Children look to their parents for clues about how to react
- Re-establish as many of your family's routines as possible
- Listen to your child and accept their feelings
- Make sure your children know the family has a plan for this event and those in the future
- Most children will recover naturally following an event, without extra help
- For the small number who don't, there is effective psychological help

Reference - Saunders, Matt, et al., Triple P – Positive Parenting Program®, 2019

For more information on Triple P Positive Parenting go online to <https://www.triple-parenting.ca/alb-en/triple-p/> or contact your local FCSS and/or Family Resource Network

Disclaimer

The Triple P – Positive Parenting Program® is an effective, practical approach to raising children. It is based on the development of strong nurturing relationships, and aims to prevent behavioural and emotional problems in children. Triple P is supported by a body of evidence that shows its efficacy with many families in many different cultures and situations. Various factors might affect whether a Triple P intervention is effective with a particular child, including the child's age and developmental level, the child's setting/environment, the parent's skill and persistence in applying the intervention, and the practitioner's skill in delivering the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program with fidelity.

Children who exhibit signs of dangerous behaviour, to either themselves or others, should be referred to a qualified professional. Parents with children currently under the supervision of a professional are encouraged to discuss their participation in Triple P with that professional.