

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD FOLLOWING A DISTRESSING INCIDENT

For Parents and Carers

This resource has been developed to provide you with information and suggested ways to help your child following a distressing incident.

When a young person finds out information about an alleged incident involving incidents of concern online that may have violated their privacy and integrity, learning about this can be quite distressing for them. It is often unclear as to the types of reactions young people might have. There is no 'typical' reaction as every young person will respond differently.

Young people may experience a range of reactions, but over time they are likely to return to their level of functioning evidenced prior to the incident.

However, there may be a number of young people who could continue to experience difficulties for some time and therefore it is important to seek support from a professional who can assist your child to work through their feelings and emotions.

You are an important support to your child, but firstly you need to be aware of how you are coping and attend to meeting your own needs so you can be available to support your child. You may want to seek some professional support to help you manage your emotions and feelings.

Specialised supports available for you include:

- Student Support Service Officers in your school
- Your General Practitioner (GP)
- Parentline – 132289
- Headspace www.headspace.org.au
- Office of the Child eSafety Commission www.esafety.gov.au
- Australian Federal Police www.afp.gov.au

Counselling support offers you a safe place to talk about and explore your concerns, emotions and feelings.

It will be difficult for you to provide support to your child until you have strategies in place to manage your own emotions and feelings.

Common reactions young people may exhibit include:

- Shocked

- Asking questions about the incident
- Withdrawing and not wanting to talk
- Change in friendship groups, or socialising
- Physical reactions such as feeling sick, headaches
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Angry and/or agitated
- Tearful or crying
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Change in appetite

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD

Suggestions that can help you communicate with your child

It is not uncommon for adolescents to be reluctant to talk about or engage in a difficult conversation

Explaining what has happened

- Ask your child about what has happened, explain that it can be difficult understanding what has happened, acknowledge that you don't know if you do not have an answer to a question your child asks.
- It is okay to be honest with your child and let them know that sometimes we don't have the answer to questions in relation to a particular incident.

Supporting and caring

- Young people will look to trusted adults such as parents/carers or peers for comfort when they are upset and they will also be guided by adult reactions. Try to be calm and answer questions truthfully.
- Reassure your child you care about them and will be there for them. Give your child a hug.

Listen to your child

- Listen to what your child is saying, be guided by what they are asking you/telling you. If your child expresses feelings and emotions such as anger, fear and/or sadness, acknowledge that it is okay to feel like this. Talk about appropriate ways of expressing feelings such as anger.
- Your child may not want to talk about the incident or may not be able to express how they are feeling. Sometimes young people express their feelings and emotions through their behaviour. Take notice of any behaviour changes and you may want to discuss any concerns with a professional.

Suggested ways to provide a sensitive and supportive environment for your child

- Try to stick to your child's normal routine – young people like predictability and consistency.

- Encourage your child's usual activities – physical activities, sporting events, catching up with friends.
- Encourage problem solving – talk to your child about solving a problem using a basic problem solving method – identify the problem, come up with ideas about how they might solve the problem, have your child choose the best one from the list of ways they might solve the problem, have your child try out their chosen way of solving the problem, talk about whether it worked or not.
- If the solution did not work go back to the list and have them choose another way of solving the problem and repeat the last two steps.
- Stay calm – Be aware of having conversations with others about the incident in front of your child – conversations can be misinterpreted.
- Monitor social media – sit with your child if they choose to watch or listen to media reports about the incident. Seek advice or support about how you might behave safely online and what to do when you see something distressing online. Police urge people to be aware when posting and sharing photos on social media as they can spread quickly and sometimes be impossible to remove.
- It is considered to be unhelpful to remove your child's access to social media
- Supportive people – Talk to your child about who they feel can support them at home and at school.
- Health and Wellbeing – being mindful of healthy eating and family time. Spend time together, reinforcing that you are there to support them.

If you are concerned about your child's behaviour, it can be helpful to make an appointment to discuss this with the school's Principal.