

## What to do when more bad things happen

When something bad happens (Critical Incident) a stress response is: **A normal reaction to an abnormal event.**

For further training we would recommend Mental Health First Aid, which is offered across the province ([www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca/](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca/)). The following was adapted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's [NCTSN] document on Psychological First Aid (2006).

What you can do:

- Speak slowly in simple and concrete terms.
- If children and youth want to talk, be prepared to listen. When you listen, focus on hearing what they want to tell you and how you can be of help.
- Acknowledge the positive things they have done to keep themselves and often others safe.(ie: ran away, called for help, talked to a trusted adult)
- Give information that directly addresses their immediate needs and repeat answers as often as needed. It is normal to not remember when under stress.
- Give information that is accurate and age-appropriate.
- The goal is to reduce distress and promote healthy functioning.

For children and adolescents:

- Sit at their eye level.
- Help label their feelings using simple language: mad, sad, scared, worried vs terrified or horrified.
- Match your language to their developmental stage.
- Listen carefully and check that you understand the child regularly.
- Be aware that children may show developmental regression in their behaviour and use of language.

What not to do:

- Do not ask for details ["debrief"]of what happened.
- Do not assume you know what they are experiencing or what they have been through.
- Do not assume they have been traumatized by what they have been exposed to.
- Do not pathologize. Having a reaction to a bad thing happening is normal.
- Do not talk down or focus on helplessness. Focus instead on what has been effective or how they tried to help themselves or others.
- Do not assume that they want to talk to you. Often being physically present in a supportive and calm way helps people feel safer and more able to cope.
- Do not speculate or offer inaccurate information. If you cannot answer a question do your best to learn the facts and then offer an answer.