

Talking With Members about Tragic Events

Children are better able to cope with traumatic events if they have support from trusted adults and friends. Club staff can help ensure members that the Club still remains a positive safe space. Here are some tips to keep in mind that may be useful when talking to members about tragic events such as mass shootings, community violence, plane crashes or natural disasters.

- **Don't project your own fears onto members.** It is natural for staff to feel vulnerable and scared when tragic events occur, but it's important not to overwhelm members with emotions and to remain calm and in control. Members will often take emotional cues from adults. If trusted adults appear to be nervous or scared they will too.
- **Manage the flow of information.** Over exposure to the tragedy can be overwhelming for members and can fuel their fear. In the Clubs try to avoid having TV's on stations that continue to report the event, and monitor how members share information on social media. Don't minimize the event, but try to limit their exposure in the Clubs as much as you can.
- **Be open to answering questions.** Club members may ask why this happened and seek to understand the impact on their life. Staff members do not have to have all the answers, but encouraging members to express their feelings and being open and honest will continue to instill their trust.
- **Remind members about trustworthy adults in their lives.** Reassure members that before the tragedy occurred, they have trustworthy and supportive adults in their lives who are still working to keep them safe. Accepting their feelings and communicating with them will demonstrate that you are there.

There are some Club activities that may help support members and help them process the tragedy.

- **Restore hope in the future.** Help members regain faith in the future by planning a small activity that will take place in the future so they have something to look forward to by a trusted adult.
- **Work with the family.** Engage families to ensure members are getting balanced meals and enough rest. Also, if a member is displaying signs of continued distress, inform the family and provide grief support resources.
- **Encourage creative projects.** Have members draw or send pictures or letters to those affected by the tragedy, or paint or draw pictures to show how they feel and hang them in your Club.
- **Provide relaxing play activities.** Providing activities where members can use their hands, such as playing with play dough or clay, or having them create their own stress balls can help relieve tension. Creating music with instruments or rhythm toys can also help relieve stress.
- **Read stories with happy endings.** Continue to instill hope and read stories or provide books with happy endings or books about how people cope with grief. Go to www.fema.gov/kids/tch_bks.tm.
- **Have discussion groups.** Teen members especially may be more willing to talk about how they feel with other members and share their thoughts. Also work with teens on activities that may help younger members with coping.

Adapted from "Talking With Children About Tragic Events" <http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/talking-with-children-about-tragic-events/> and Boys and Girls Clubs of America "Responding to Fear: How Boys & Girls Staff Can Provide Emotional Support" www.bgca.net