



# SUPPORTING CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL COVID-19

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# Outline



## Outline of the session

1. Who needs support and how do we know?

Questions and comments

2. What can we do for all students

3. How do we work with students who need some individualized support?

Questions and comments

# Who may need additional support?

## Circumstances that increase vulnerability to events

- Direct Involvement
- Changes in family/whānau circumstances, ongoing worries
- Separation from family during the event
- Previous need for additional support, particularly for those students who experience heightened anxiety
- Past and recent traumatic events
- Changes in social connections with peers
- Sense of identity closely tied to participation in sport or other activity that has been disrupted.

# What can we look for?



**Emotions such as fear, sadness, grief and guilt often present themselves in unexpected ways**

- Anxiety
  - Difficulty concentrating, distraction
  - Muscle tension and hair-trigger response
  - Sense of hopelessness, disengagement
  - Sleep problems/tiredness, irritability, listlessness or nightmares
- Changes in behaviour, angry outbursts, new preferences for play
- Reticence around new activities
- Reversion to younger behaviours
- Clinging or withdrawal
- Somatic problems – sore stomach, headache
- Challenged by academic tasks

Questions or  
comments

# What can we do?

## Keep the response simple, main response is with all children

### 1. Information: Sense of safety

What has happened? What is happening? Why?  
Opportunities to ask questions, share information

### 2. Social relationships

Children rely on adults  
Peer interaction and play can support emotional balance, shared activity

### 3. Consistency

New normal explained, routines, boundaries

### 4. Positive experience

Repeated positive experience  
Focus on children's resilience and prior strengths  
Balance of familiar and interesting activity, maintain equilibrium  
Active participation

### 5. Meaning

Changes in stories of self and the world  
Opportunities to examine perspectives and create or affirm visions and directions.



- Sometimes children need additional help
- Teachers may want to talk with students to understand more
- Talking may occur in a safe environment with privacy respected, ideally within the context of everyday activity
- Have adult-child conversations rather than counselling
- Access additional support if serious issues emerge

# Talking with children after an event

## Initiate

- It may be safer to talk around the topic or make a comment (e.g. it seems to me that you are a bit sad).
- Careful not to burden children with adult questions
- Provide a variety of ways for children to express their feelings, especially if they are unable or do not feel comfortable to talk

Drawing, writing, video/audio, play (e.g. tactile play, role play)

## Listening and responding to the story

- Find out what children know? What are they thinking? What is their perspective on the event?
- Sensitively note what is good and supportive while acknowledging any worry or loss
- Careful self-sharing

## Finishing conversations

Leave on a positive note if possible, indicating adult availability, and an activity to do.



New understandings will help shape up support on the dimensions that are supporting all children

1. Information
2. Social relationships
3. Consistency
4. Positive experience
5. Meaning

Aim to reassure and create optimism for the future

Questions or  
comments

# Helpful websites

## National Association of School Psychologists

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>

## New Zealand Ministry of Education

<https://education.govt.nz/school/health-safety-and-wellbeing/emergencies-and-traumatic-incidents/>