

Ways to Help Students in Response to World Events

World events, like accidents, natural disasters, mass violence, civil disorder, war and conflict can impact individuals, classes, schools, communities and beyond, depending on their nature and scope.

How students react to events will vary. Developmental stage, physical or emotional proximity to the event, and prior experience with traumatic circumstances can impact how students respond. Reactions can last for days and sometimes weeks. Typically, they subside over time as we help students talk through feelings, reassure them that they are safe and protected, and help them to gain perspective.

Common reactions to challenging world events

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Lack of focus
- Anger or irritability
- Social distancing
- Physical complaints
- Absenteeism

How to support students after world events

Maintain a calm classroom environment

- During challenging times, the reactions of adults will set the tone for students.
- Set a calm pace for learning, extending deadlines as needed.
- Maintain regular, predictable routines.
- Reduce the emphasis on and/or duration of formal lessons.
- Consider if any sensitive curriculum content might need to be delayed/changed.
- Use learning activities that allow you to float and check-in with students.
- Create quiet spaces for student reflection and dialogue within the classroom.
- Encourage students to take breaks from the news and social media.

Support students as they work through strong feelings after a challenging world event, in the course of daily school life

- Rather than starting a discussion at a class level, invite students to initiate conversations when the time is right for them.
- Listen well and notice how your students are viewing the situation.
- Keep explanations of events age-appropriate and factual.
- Calm worries, re-affirm safety procedures and reassure students that they are safe.
- Validate feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, etc. and note that it may take time to work through these emotions.
- Encourage students to draw on their faith, natural supports, self-care skills, and other sources of strength.
- Model compassion, positive coping and self-care skills
- Help students to notice blessings, helpers, courage, and signs of hope

Notice when a student is struggling and may require additional support

- Make a list of students who may be at risk given physical or emotional proximity to the world event, prior trauma, etc.
- Monitor these students more closely, checking in with them each day.
- Be mindful that there may be students without an obvious link or vulnerability who may experience difficulty.
- Watch for changes in student behaviour and/or emotions that are excessive in duration and intensity.
- Watch for signs that student behaviour and/or emotions are interfering with day to day functioning at school.
- If you have concerns, record your observations and consult with appropriate staff (e.g., principal, social worker).
- Discuss your concerns with the student in a compassionate and age-appropriate manner.
- Use regular school/class protocols to connect with parents/guardians to discuss your observations and concerns

Offer additional classroom support, as needed

- Welcome students who may be more at risk, in a calm, caring, and intentional way each day.
- Let students who are struggling know about available school supports and how to access them.
- Create opportunities for quiet check-ins and dialogue.
- Maintain academic expectations but soften these if a student seems overwhelmed.
- Help students to complete school tasks by chunking assignments, pairing them with another student, etc.
- Offer more time for test and assignment completion, as needed.
- Allow students to cue you if they are struggling and want to talk or need to step back from a task for a time.
- Help students to engage in activities that may assist with healing (e.g., write a card, make a donation, etc).

Assist struggling students and their families to access more intensive support, as needed

- Know about [available supports](#) at the school, board, and community level.
- Know your local pathway to access services.
- Work with the school team to describe available supports to the parent/guardian and/or student.
- With parent/guardian consent, share your observations to assist with referrals and treatment planning.
- Continue to provide classroom accommodations to students struggling after a challenging world event.
- Use classroom strategies recommended by the service provider

Take care of yourself

Remember to take care of yourself too—for your well-being, and so you're better able to support the students you serve. Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. Recognize that grief reactions can last for many days or weeks.

- Take the opportunity to process the situation and your feelings with your friends, family, cultural/faith community, and colleagues.
- Keep regular schedules and routines.
- Remember to eat, sleep, play, exercise, and laugh. Give yourself permission for down time.
- Practice positive ways of coping with sadness, fear, anger, and worry.
- Ask for help. You don't have to face this experience alone. Help is available for you through your employee assistance program, or you may wish to consult with your family physician or contact a local helpline. Wellness Together Canada also offers supports that may be helpful.