

Strategies to Address Difficult Events with Young People

11 APPROACHES TO PROCESSING TRAUMATIC EVENTS WITH YOUTH IN YOUR OST PROGRAM.

Check-in with yourself

Disconnect from the news and social media. Try to take a moment for yourself to journal, talk to a friend, or move your body. Practice mindfulness. Check in with your coworkers. Get support from your personal networks.



Ask Questions

Turn to youth and allow them to share what they want to know. Try "What have you heard about the event that occurred?" and "How are you feeling about it?"



Look for the Helpers

Turn off the media and focus on the *good* that happens during tragedies. Try to find the positives. This strategy works especially well with younger students.



Offer Choices for Support

Create space, but keep your boundaries. Routines can be grounding! Give structure around processing time. For example, offer four options (color, draw, or read) for students to do in their reflection time, then we will have a conversation. Youth can choose what feels best to them!



Don't Rush to Intellectualize



If your mind is spinning with curricular connections, write them down and save them for later on! Resist directives to stick to your scripted curriculum or ignore what has happened. Give your students space to *feel* and *process* now.

Use Available Resources



Don't reinvent the wheel! Look for existing tools and resources. Try checking out Twitter hashtags, Facebook groups, Blog posts, PBS, or Books. Educators are all in this together.

Reassure



Kids need to know that the adults in their lives are there to help and protect them. When you are with children, emphasize that you're doing everything you can to keep them safe. Facilitate simple, responsive, reassuring conversations. When appropriate, go back to routines.

Adapt to Remote Instruction



Utilize virtual tools to your advantage. *Journals* can help students process their thoughts and feelings. *Graffiti Boards* can help students "hear" each other's ideas. *Wraparound* asks students to share aloud a quick response to a prompt. Take advantage of existing tools to help youth share!

Validate Grief

Allow space and time to feel grief. Try giving students the opportunity to feel their feelings. Resist the urge to distract, joke, or cheer up youth.



Model Not Knowing



It is okay not to know everything! Think of questions *with youth* using simple prompts like "What I know," "What I think I know," & "What I want to know." Assess the urgency of rising questions. Try looking at trustworthy sources together for answers. Model how to find reliable information. Questions about mental health needs should be answered by connecting students to resources and validating. With more complex questions, set them aside and revisit later!

Be Gentle with Yourself



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