

Educational Psychology Service

Critical incident response (CIR)

Explaining major incidents to children

Key points to remember:

- Create a calm and relaxed environment within the school / classroom, ensuring that adults are containing and consistent
- Let children hear the story accurately and calmly
- Helping children to separate fact from fiction is also important. Adults should try to discuss known facts with children, and help avoid speculation or exaggeration
- Children need reassurance e.g. “the police are dealing with it now”
- Don’t be tempted to shield the children from bad news, as it’s inevitable they will hear it and see it
- Taking the time to listen and talk to children is very important. Many children will have seen images within the media that will prompt questions. They will continue to hear about these events in the coming days as well and will be reminded by images through media and in their everyday lives, so it is important to keep those lines of communication open
- Let children express their feelings about the event and offer opportunities for them to express worries verbally and non-verbally - e.g. by having a worry box in the classroom, having a key adult they can access when needed
- Engage the children in activities where they can express sympathy for victims, think of ways of helping and promoting non-violence
- Children may want to think of ways that they can remember the victims / express their sympathy (e.g. drawing pictures, writing cards)
- Ultimately, give children the message that most people do not resort to violence.

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