



Trauma Notification Training



Trauma Notifications to Children

Children have less experience and internal resources to draw upon at times of crisis. They rely on caregivers for emotional and physical safety and care. Sudden and traumatic death interferes with a child's sense of control and safety in the world. Therefore, caregivers are the best person to make a trauma notification to a child if possible.



General Considerations

General Developmental Stages for Children

- Preschool aged children mostly see death as temporary, reversible, and impersonal.
- Children ages 5-9-begin to see that all living things eventually die, and death is final.
- Children ages 9 through adolescence understand that death is irreversible and that they too will die someday.

Provide the trauma notification in a private space

- Away from others in a quiet space.
- Do not overwhelm the child or children with a lot of adults in the same space.
- If caregiver is unable to provide the notification, identify an adult who is known, close, and supportive. This ensures the notification is done in a culturally appropriate, spiritually sensitive manner.

Be honest

- There is no way to avoid the pain associated with the death of a loved one.
- When children are not told the truth, they are often confused about what has happened.

Delivery

- Be mindful of tone of voice; softer is better.
- Ensure the notification is delivered using language appropriate for the child's age.
- Children cannot handle too much information at once.
- Siblings will often share with one another and if possible, deliver notification to them together.
- Depending on the age, children may not have a concept of death.
- It is often helpful to explain death in terms of physical functions ceasing.

Follow Up

- Children will often look to their caregivers to learn how to grieve.
- Children often need to process the notification and may not have any initial questions.
- Be available to answer questions when asked.
- Routine is important for children so maintaining their schedule if at all possible is critical.

Trauma Notification Example:

"Your sister, Melissa, has died. Her body has stopped working. She can't run, walk, eat, sleep or go to the bathroom anymore. She doesn't feel any pain."



Suggestions

- For younger children, meet them on their level. Join them on the floor or at a location in their home where they are most comfortable.
- If children vary in age, try to deliver the notification with siblings who are within a similar developmental stage (Ex: teenagers, preschool age; it is not suggested to tell siblings all together if they have an age gap such as 3-year-old and 12-year-old).
- Make sure to use the words, "dead" or "died".
- Ask if the child has any questions.
- Be prepared for a variety of emotional responses.
- Validate the child's emotional response and let them know that they can expect to feel a variety of emotions over time.
- Be prepared to repeat yourself, especially to younger children.
- Keep daily routine. Children need consistency.
- Don't put a time limit or expectations on child's bereavement. Everyone grieves in their own way.
- Limit media and social media exposure.



Resources

[THE DOUGY CENTER: THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES \(www.dougy.org\)](http://www.dougy.org)

Provides a safe place where children, teens, young adults and their families grieving a death can share their experiences.

[NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN \(www.childrengrieve.org\)](http://www.childrengrieve.org)

Raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them.

[NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS \(NASP\) \(www.nasponline.org\)](http://www.nasponline.org)

Represents and supports the profession of school psychology by advancing effective practices to improve students' learning, behavior, mental health, and by maintaining essential standards for ethics and practice

[NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK \(www.nctsn.org\)](http://www.nctsn.org)

Raises standards of care and improves access to services for traumatized children, their families, and communities throughout the United States

[OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME \(https://ovc.ojp.gov/help-for-victims/overview\)](https://ovc.ojp.gov/help-for-victims/overview)

Provides an online directory of victim services through the country. They also provide information about victim assistance and compensation programs available in communities around the country.

[SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION \(SAMHSA\) \(www.samhsa.gov\)](http://www.samhsa.gov)

TIP Sheet: Helping school age children with traumatic grief

[YALE CHILD STUDY CENTER: THE CHILDHOOD VIOLENT TRAUMA CENTER \(www.medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/communitypartnerships/cvtc/\)](http://www.medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/communitypartnerships/cvtc/)

Improving the lives of children and families through research, service, and training. Provides multi-disciplinary interventions, community policing training, and consultation following a mass violence incident.