

WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

for parents (with children over 12 yrs)

After a terrible event, children may have different kinds of ideas or feelings. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Being around family & friends, they may feel happy or safe. Other times, they might feel sad, scared, or angry.



A crisis can affect how they feel, how they think, and how they act. For example:

- Fear
- Anger at others or self
- Guilt e.g., that they did not try to help their friends
- Sadness e.g., at having lost close friends
- Withdrawing, keeping away from friends & family
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- Difficulty with concentration
- Shock
- Body aches and pains
- Repeatedly thinking about or experiencing images of what happened
- Making radical life decisions about their future.

All children react differently. Some will exhibit behavior change immediately and others not until a few weeks later. Most will recover in a few weeks.

What should parents do?

Try and reestablish family routines and schedules as much as possible. Returning to school is important.

- Encourage them to eat well, get enough sleep and exercise.
- Spend time with them and listen and try to understand their feelings.
- Even if it is difficult, it is important to do some fun things as a family like playing carom or watching a movie.
- Children find comfort in saying Dua or praying together as a family -but do not force them.
- Stay calm during their anger outbursts. Later talk to them about it and how it represents their feeling about the trauma.
- In case there are arguments between family members, help them to accept that different family members will have different feelings and reactions to the event.

- If you find yourself being more protective and restrictive, explain to your child that it is temporary
- Support them if they want to participate in actions to support or honor the victims.
- Watch out for behaviors like smoking or taking extra risks. Talk calmly and explain that these may be reactions to the trauma but are still dangerous and harmful.
- Beware that watching too much of TV especially regarding the traumatic event is not helpful.
- Take care of yourself and be aware of your own feelings and reactions to the trauma. Seek support if you need to from others.

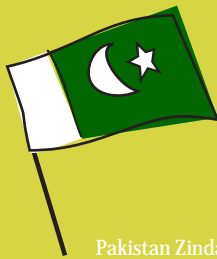
How to talk to your child?

It is important to talk to your child:

- Start the topic but don't force them to talk.
- Listen and encourage them to explain their feelings and concerns.
- If they feel helpless, encourage them about what people are doing to provide security.
- If they want to make major decisions, tell them you understand but it is good to take one day at a time for now.
- If they talk about their guilt, reassure them what happened to their friends is not their fault.
- Discuss how these feelings are normal and will improve with time. Share your own feelings and concerns.
- Stay calm yourself
- Try to share stories of support and goodness that people have demonstrated after a disaster.

When to seek help for your child?

- When problems continue for 2-3 months after the trauma
- Increased worries about their own and others safety
- Saying repeatedly that they want to die
- Change in school performance or attendance
- Decreased interest in friends
- Risky or impulsive behaviors like fast driving or smoking.



Pakistan Zindabad

**This brochure has been prepared by senior mental health professionals
and is free for printing and distributing anywhere in the country.**

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