

19 March 2019

Dear Parents/Caregivers and Whanau

Our deepest sympathy and thoughts go out to all who have been affected by the events in Christchurch.

A statement was read out by each Form Teacher yesterday that acknowledged what had occurred on Friday in Christchurch, but also expressed, as has been so often, "this is not who we are". As a school, we are aware that different people react and process situations in different ways. We are also mindful that it is important to keep to our daily routines and school commitments to ensure normalcy prevails, where possible. Students were encouraged to talk to someone such as Form Teachers/Mentors, Deans or the Guidance Counsellor, Ms Fan, if required.

Glenfield College is taking the time to consider what we can do to help. On Friday at lunchtime, 50 candles will be lit in the Theatre for the 50 victims. This is voluntary and students are welcome to attend to show their respect.

A collection will be taken at Form Period over the next three days. The purpose of this is to have a collection that is appropriate for the event that can be donated to the Give-a-little page. I strongly encourage all students and families to get behind this worthy cause.

Please find attached some documents that have been made available to the school to provide to our community. You may find these helpful and educational in strategies for minimizing stress and anxiety.

We also ask that you reflect on how we can limit or remove posting on social media that your sons and daughters may have access to, and be viewing.

Mā Maruwehi, Ka Rāhiri
With Pride and Respect



Paul McKinley
Principal



Tips for parents and educators: Supporting children and young people.

Lockdowns are an important part of school safety and crisis preparedness. We want to thank schools and early learning services for keeping all children and young people safe on Friday.

Now we need to help them recover well. An incident like this can confuse and frighten anyone who may feel unsafe or worried that their friends or loved-ones are at risk. They will look to others for information, guidance and support.

Parents and teachers can help children and young people feel safe by;

- providing reassurance and keeping to routines
- staying calm and promoting a calm environment
- doing enjoyable things together
- taking time to listen and talk

Be guided by their questions, be factual and age appropriate with your response. Children and young people do not always talk about their feelings readily – ask them if they are feeling worried.

- Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.
 - Very young children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their ELS, school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them.
 - Older primary school aged children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school, emergency services and community leaders to provide safe schools.
 - Secondary school students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school and communities safer and how to prevent violence and tragedies in society. Have a way of recording the ideas and how you might build on the ideas expressed.
- Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines (e.g. Signing out when they leave school, not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to the school safety made by students or community members, etc.), communicating any personal safety concerns to teachers and accessing support for emotional needs through teachers and the pastoral care system.
- Observe children's emotional state. Changes in behaviour, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions, particularly those who have experienced difficulties and change. Parents and teachers, seek support through your school pastoral care system or your GP.

Taking Care of Yourself After a Traumatic Event

Everyone who is in **any way** involved with a disaster or traumatic event may experience trauma reactions. You might experience these reactions if you:

- Were a witness or were involved in the event.
- Arrived upon the scene of the event.
- Had a "near miss" or were almost involved in the event.
- Knew or know others who were killed, harmed, or involved in some way.
- Have a relationship with family or friends of victims
- Have heard a lot about the event through media or friends.
- Are reminded of other traumatic incidents in your life by this event.

Trauma reactions are normal reactions to extremely **abnormal** circumstances. It is difficult to predict what type of trauma reactions you will experience following a disastrous event. It is important to allow yourself permission to have your reactions, and take care of them both by yourself and by asking for help from others, as best you can. Many people find it helpful to have information about what constitutes a typical reaction to trauma.

Typical reactions to trauma

Not everyone experiences the same set of responses to trauma, but people typically experience reactions that fall into four basic categories. Here are some reactions that you may be experiencing:

Psychological and Emotional

- Heightened anxiety or fear
- Irritability, restlessness, or over-excitability
- Feelings of sadness, moodiness, more crying than usual
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- Feelings of numbness or detachment
- "Survivor guilt", or feelings of self-blame that you escaped the tragedy
- Re-experiencing of the traumatic event, possibly including:
 - intrusive thoughts or images of the event
 - distressing dreams or nightmares
 - flashbacks about the event
 - distress when exposed to events that remind you of the trauma
- Feelings of isolation from others
- Hyper-vigilance (feelings especially attuned to events around you, scanning environment for possible danger)

Cognitive

- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings confused or distracted, slower thought than normal

Physical

- Headaches
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Exaggerated startle response (tendency to startle easily at loud noises)
- Fatigue or feelings slowed down

Behavioural

- Hyperactivity, or less activity
- Heightened tendency to behave irritably
- Withdrawal, social isolation
- Avoidance of activities or places that remind you of traumatic event
- Insomnia
- Strong need to talk about the event, read accounts about the event

You may recognize yourself as experiencing some of the above reactions. Remember that your response is normal. Immediately following a traumatic event you will probably feel disrupted, dazed, and somewhat confused. You will notice that you are not behaving as you typically

would. It is important to take care of yourself as best you can. Here are some self-care suggestions for you.

Self Care – If you feel that this event has had a significant impact on you, these may be some helpful tips:

Keep reminding yourself that your responses are **normal** responses to a stressful situation. Give yourself permission to do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself. Your body and mind will tell you what you need to do--your job is to listen to them.

Get plenty of rest when you're tired, and use the energy you have if you experience hyperactivity at times. Don't force yourself to be active if you don't have the energy, or rest when you feel tired.

Talk to people as much as you need to. Reach out. You may experience a need to talk repetitively about the trauma. If you can find someone who is willing to listen, use her/him to talk to about how you are feeling. If you do not have anyone in your support network to use, consider calling a crisis line, going to a crisis center, or using other community resources--they are there to help you.

Spend time with others, even if you don't feel like talking. It can be very comforting to know you're not alone. Try to find someone or someplace that feels safe and comforting to you, and spend time there.

Don't make any major life decisions or big life changes if at all possible. This is not a time to put pressure on yourself to do anything out of the ordinary. Concentrate on taking care of yourself.

Do things that feel good to you--take baths, read, exercise, watch television, spend time with friends and family, fix yourself a special treat, or whatever else feels nurturing and self-caring.

Allow yourself to cry, rage, and express your feelings when you need to. Try not to numb your feelings with alcohol or drugs. This will only complicate your situation.

The Process of Recovery

It is important to know that recovering from a trauma is a process that may take a long time. The initial response of disruption (perhaps alternating with numbness) may last days, weeks, or longer. Don't be surprised if you continue to experience these reactions for longer than you expected. It is impossible to predict how long you will experience effects of the trauma, but usually trauma reactions gradually decrease over time. If you experience another stressful event while recovering from this trauma, you may find that your trauma reactions reappear for awhile. This re-activation, or delayed trauma response, is perfectly normal.

At **any** time during this process, you may find it useful to ask for professional help from a counselor or mental health professional. There are some circumstances under which you should **definitely** get professional help:

- if you find yourself feeling overwhelmed with stress
- if you find that your daily functioning continues to be impaired so that you cannot carry out your life tasks
- if post-trauma fears interfere with your ability to return to certain places or situations that remind you of the trauma

EAPworks' Employee Assistance Programme is there to assist – contact us on:
0800 SELFHELP – 0800 735 343 – for telephone support or to make an appointment,
or email: info@eapworks.co.nz or www.eapworks.co.nz