

What to Expect from Elementary-aged Children Dealing with Loss or Trauma

While no one reacts to stress and trauma in the same way elementary-aged children may exhibit the following behaviors when dealing with trauma or loss:

- They may ask questions and seek to try to understand what happened. Be patient and refer them to adults that can answer their questions.
- Children below the age of eight may engage in magical thinking and believe they could have prevented the tragedy. Recognize these feelings and fears but do not validate them.
- Children ages nine through twelve may feel less comfortable showing feelings and seeing expressions of grief in others. Make sure to provide these students with a variety of ways to express their feeling.

- Typical reactions could include:
 - Behavioral difficulties
 - Decreased concentration
 - Poor school performance
 - Increased moodiness or irritability
 - Withdrawal
 - Somatic complaints (headaches & stomachaches)

- Severe reactions to trauma are rare and not always indicative of a mental illness. If symptoms don't go away or begin to interfere with the child's day-to-day life, they should be brought to the attention of a licensed medical or mental health professional. Severe reactions could include:
 - Hypervigilance/panic attacks
 - Extremely inappropriate and repeated aggression towards
 - Suicidal or homicidal ideation
 - Severe depression and loss of interest in most activities
 - Taking excessive precautions (ex. only sleeping with a weapon nearby)

Note. Adapted from: The Dougy Center and School crisis prevention and intervention: The PREPaRE model (3rd ed.)