



Advice for Principals and Teachers

3. When school recommences

- Expect the unexpected. You will hopefully have a sense of who is coming to school when it partially reopens. However, there might be changes. Some children might be too frightened to come to school or to be away from their parents; in other cases, parents might not want to have their children out of their sight.
- Some children might be late or need to leave early because of transport arrangements. Some children might want to be with their siblings or friends even if they are in different classes. Some children might come with nothing – no supplies or lunch. Being prepared for these possibilities and being flexible in the early days saves extra stress.
- Children will show different responses to the events that have happened. Some will be well-informed about the crisis event, others will have simplistic or even inaccurate understandings. Some might have found the situation frightening and be quiet and withdrawn, others might be nervy and wriggly. Some might cry, some might get angry and some might even laugh inappropriately. Your response needs to be calm and even handed.
- When talking about the children's individual experiences, avoid putting children on the spot or asking them direct questions. In studies conducted by a range of post-disaster researchers, children's experiences were approached indirectly through picture books, arts-based activities and drama, allowing children to share as much as they were ready for – and this will change over time as they regain confidence and trust.
- Distracting children from things they find distressing is important. Acknowledge their sadness, fear or anxiety but gently move to another activity, especially calming ones such as relaxation exercises, listening to a story or quiet music.
- It is ok to have fun. Playing a game, re-reading one of their favourite stories or watching a video can help lift the mood. Children need to know



Helping teachers work with children when they first return to school following major traumatic or life-changing events

that in the midst of uncertainty there is still happiness and hope.

- Games, physical challenges and getting outdoors can release energy and tension and provide a break from indoor activities but, of course, must be done within any physical distancing limitations.
- Don't say it will never happen again but focus on what we have learned and how we are better prepared. Recognise the many people who contributed to the community's response and strategy.
- Making plans, thinking about you can help others, talking about the future and discussing new possibilities, are also part of healing and moving forward in a positive way. Find ways for students ways to contribute to the community's recovery.