

# HELPING TEENS THROUGH TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

When a teenager has gone through a traumatic experience such as a shooting or the death of a friend, it's crucial for parents to respond with sensitivity and care. Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) principles emphasize providing immediate support and creating a safe environment for the teenager to process their emotions and experiences. Here's a recommended approach:

**Ensure Safety:** First and foremost, ensure that your teenager is safe and out of harm's way. If the traumatic event is ongoing or recent, prioritize their physical safety.

**Immediate Presence:** Be physically present with your teenager. Your presence can provide comfort and reassurance during this distressing time.

**Listen Actively:** Encourage your teenager to talk about their feelings, thoughts, and reactions to the traumatic event. Listen attentively and without judgment. Let them express themselves at their own pace.

**Validate Emotions:** Validate your teenager's emotions. Let them know that their feelings, whether fear, sadness, anger, or confusion, are entirely normal and understandable given the circumstances.

**Reassurance:** Offer reassurance and comfort. Reassure your teenager that you are there to support them and that it's okay to grieve, be upset, or feel overwhelmed.

**Respect Their Wishes:** Respect your teenager's wishes regarding how much they want to talk or share about the traumatic experience. Some may need to talk extensively, while others may prefer more time to process on their own.

**Provide Information:** Offer factual information about the situation, especially if there are any uncertainties or rumors circulating. Be honest and straightforward, but avoid overwhelming them with unnecessary details.

**Encourage Self-Care:** Suggest self-care strategies like getting enough rest, eating well, and engaging in relaxing activities. Encourage them to engage in activities they enjoy, as this can provide a sense of normalcy.

**Limit Exposure to Trauma:** In the case of shootings or other violent incidents, limit your teenager's exposure to media coverage or graphic images related to the event. Excessive exposure can retraumatize them.

**Seek Professional Help:** Be open to the possibility of seeking professional mental health support for your teenager. A trained therapist can help them process the trauma and develop coping strategies.

**Connect with Others:** Encourage your teenager to connect with friends or support groups who have experienced similar traumatic events. Sharing experiences with others who understand can be comforting.

**Maintain Routine:** Reestablish a sense of routine in your teenager's life as soon as possible. Consistency and predictability can provide stability during times of upheaval.

**Monitor for Signs of Distress:** Keep an eye out for signs of distress, such as significant changes in behavior, sleep disturbances, withdrawal, or persistent anxiety or depression. Seek professional help if these signs persist.

Remember that each teenager responds to trauma differently, and it's essential to be patient and understanding. Trauma can have long-lasting effects, and the healing process may take time. Your unwavering support and willingness to seek professional help when needed are crucial in helping your teenager recover from a traumatic experience.