

A Guide for Families: Restoring Community Connections

When a community's trust is breached, it is important to take time to restore community connections.

When someone breaches the trust of a community, it impacts everyone. People are not always impacted in the same way, but when an individual deceives people within a community, it touches everyone in a personal way. In order to move forward, it is important to consider how you feel about what has happened. Working through your own feelings will help you support your children.

You may be feeling:

- That your sense of safety has been shaken
- Anger
- Overly protective
- A loss of trust
- A lack of control
- A lack of motivation
- A lack of hope
- Scared
- Overwhelmed
- Sad
- Isolated and alone
- Guilt
- Blame
- Embarrassed
- Vulnerable
- Grief and loss
- Disbelief (turn a blind eye)

What do you need to do?

Start by learning the facts. Accurate information about the situation can help you turn fear into confidence that you can keep your family safe. Attend an information evening for parents and find out what you need to know.

Get involved in or provide input to the activity that the organization pursues to ensure that this situation does not re-occur.

Potential Impacts on Children:

We recognize that experiences such as accidents, abuse, violence, death, and/or natural disasters can be traumatic, but we do not always recognize the ways they affect and influence children's and family's everyday lives. They can deeply affect a child's sense of security and self-esteem.

What your child may be feeling:

- Anxiety (i.e. "What if my parents are going to disappear?"). Children may seek extra comfort and want to sleep in your bed at night.
- Fear
- Anger
- Guilt
- Sadness
- Confused
- Ambivalent
- No symptoms or changes in feeling or behaviours

Behaviours you may observe in your child:

There are a wide range of behaviours that children who have experienced trauma exhibit. Children communicate how they are feeling through their behaviour. Pay attention to signs that your child may be experiencing some distress:

Children under 12:

- Sleeping problems
- Nightmares
- Seems "out of sorts"
- Starts wetting the bed
- Change in typical behaviour patterns
- Returns to less mature behaviours (e.g. sucking their thumb, tantrums)
- Shows signs of irritability, has outbursts or tantrums, is easily frustrated
- Clinginess
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in school performance
- Anger/aggression towards others
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Doesn't want to play with usual circle of friends
- Physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, or chest
- pain (consult with your child's doctor to make sure they are not related to something else before attributing to distress)
- Doesn't want to go to school or daycare
- Generalized fear and anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- Forgetfulness

Adolescents:

- Change in general behaviour, seems “out of sorts”
- Anger/aggression toward others
- Sleeping problems
- General fear and anxiety
- Defiance, particularly toward adults who are the same gender as the offender
- Substance abuse
- Cutting
- Withdrawn/lack of interest in activities they typically enjoyed
- Isolating him/herself from friends
- Changes in eating habits
- Extreme changes in the way the child is dressing
- Change in school performance
- For some adolescents there may be no observable behaviour changes but don't assume a child hasn't been impacted

What your child needs:

- Reassurance s/he is safe and protected.
- Tolerance for moody behaviour such as clinginess, pushing away, and outbursts.
- Consultation with your family doctor who will be able to refer, if necessary, your child to appropriate services.
- Help to rebuild a positive sense of self, and sense of control over their environment.
- Clear expectations, but flexibility and care when rules are broken. Gently re-establish the boundaries.
- Patience.

Things to do with to help your child process the situation and move forward:

- When children are not directly told what has happened, and their questions are not answered, they will make up what happened in their mind. The story they make up may be as traumatic, or even more traumatic than the actual event. They begin to believe the story they made up, and react to it as if it were real. It is important to ask your child what they believe happened, and keep checking on their perspective throughout the recovery process.
- Engage your child in age-appropriate activities that require movement from both sides of the body such as: building (blocks, models, lego, etc.), art activities, dancing, swimming, basketball, bike riding, walking, etc. and other forms of exercise to help them process upsetting or concerning thoughts, feelings or memories.
- Have your child imagine and discuss or draw a picture of a place where s/he feels the most safe and relaxed or to think about and draw something s/he really likes to do and feels really good at. Have your child post the picture somewhere s/he will see it regularly.
- Have your child imagine and discuss or draw a picture of something s/he is looking forward to or excited about. Have your child post it somewhere s/he will see it regularly.

Getting help

If you notice a change in your child's behaviour or notice that s/he does not seem quite like her/himself, let your child know that you are there to support her/him. Listen to how s/he feels, and reassure her/him that s/he is safe and that s/he will be okay.

If you have questions and your child seems to be distressed for longer than a few weeks, it is a good idea to consult with your pediatrician who can connect you with the most appropriate services.