

Debriefing after Scary Events

Some things to consider for families and staff:

Children respond to scary situations in many ways. Whenever there is an unpredictable event that causes us to consider our own safety we are at risk of experiencing symptoms of acute stress. Children are also at risk. Often during the event our bodies and minds go into action and safety mode and we are able to handle very difficult situations with strength and clarity. The response afterward can be the time that our defenses come down and the fearful thought, or emotional and/or physical responses occur. Some common symptoms in adults are; sleepiness, lethargy, headaches, muscle tension, numbness, irritability... In smaller children, they may be similar but show up in different ways such as bed wetting, crying, impulsivity, oppositional behavior, tantruming, less eye contact and distractibility

For toddlers; their senses tell them something is wrong

For preschoolers: they are understanding parts of the occurrence but may also be making up scenarios to fill in the blanks

Questions children may have during lockdown might be; when I am scared why can't mommy/daddy come get me? Are they coming back? Did I do something wrong?

If you called the parents, they are also at risk for acute stress due to not being able to respond immediately to their child's needs. This may bring up some great concern for them about how the situation was handled.

Talking to the children and families afterwards can become a place for comfort and support. Parents don't often know how to respond, what to tell their child or talk about what happened. They will probably look to you for that guidance.

Important things to remember for the parents

1. Create comfort and predictability in the home
2. Watch for where children may be getting information (tv's , iphones, adult conversations)
- 3 think about your child and what gives them comfort; reading a book, walking outside, warm bath with bubbles..
4. Try to slow down and model that for your child
5. Listen for feelings that arise and try to acknowledge them
6. Listen for thoughts they are having and reassure them when needed. Everything is ok. The teacher took good care of you. You are safe now.
7. Let the school know if there is something that would be supportive for your child now. Work as a team.

For teachers and staff

They can also feel depleted and concerned and overwhelmed by the responsibility they took on keeping everyone safe and being on alert. Recognize what you did well. Celebrate your strengths both individually and as a team.

Teachers may need a chance to de brief. There may have been a moment they are hanging onto or a frustration with the chain of events and responses that could increase stress. It helps to pin point those early on, so that everyone can move through the experience as a team and work together to build a stronger safety net for future situations.

Ideas could also arise from dialogue regarding how they led children, responded to children and dealt with the situation that might benefit other teachers