

Parenting during troubled times #heartofrchk

When a community is experiencing difficult times parents/guardians need to be aware of the possible impacts this could have on students' learning, behaviour and relationships.

Here are some reactions you might see and how parents/guardians can help their children. But of course keep in mind that not all children will feel the same way.

CHILDREN MAY:	PARENTS/GUARDIANS CAN HELP WHEN THEY:
1. Feel sad, empty, numb. Younger children may be clingy. Older children may be embarrassed to show their distress. May hide their feelings or share more on social media or with their friends.	1. Provide support by listening to concerns and feelings. Educate children about the various different ways they may be reacting to troubled times. Don't assume children all feel the same or need help. Try to accommodate students' different responses.
2. Have new or worse behaviour problems. (e.g. have outbursts, be irritable, break rules). Some may engage in serious or harmful behaviour (e.g. drug or alcohol abuse, self-injury or risky sexual behaviour).	2. Have patience with minor behaviour problems. Stay calm when setting limits. Return to predictable routines and activities as soon as possible. Refer children for professional help for any concerns about self-injury or dangerous behaviour.
3. Have trouble concentrating, paying attention, participating or meeting deadlines.	3. Understand that attention may be affected during this time. Focus on the present with gentle reminders about daily tasks. Consider modifying work routines. Ask educators to provide extra structure and instructions.
4. Appear sleepy or irritable due to having sleep problems.	4. Realise that sleep difficulties are common and can lead to more problems. Suggest healthy sleep habits (e.g. screen breaks before bed) and calming coping strategies. Request from school that deadlines are adjusted until sleep is stabilized.
5. Have physical trauma reactions like stomach aches, headaches, a pounding heart, body aches, or fast, shallow breathing.	5. Recognize physical reactions may confuse or scare children, making them even more afraid. Encourage students to use relaxation strategies like slow breathing, stretching, or physical activities.
6. Startle more easily in response to everyday noises (e.g., door slamming, dog barking, other children yelling) and become scared.	6. Identify the sources of everyday noises and that they are not dangerous. Reassure students that they are safe. Explain that physical responses are common (e.g., feeling startled, tense muscles, fast breathing) are common during troubled times when they are on high alert. Suggest using calming strategies such as slow breathing, or drinking a glass of water slowly.
7. Think life is meaningless, or withdraw from family and friends. Even children who are typically outgoing may become withdrawn. They may retreat to social media or gaming.	7. Suggest engaging in positive activities (e.g. volunteering, hobbies). Discuss ways to cope with sad feelings and the value of in-person support, talking with family or friends rather than connecting via media. Discuss ways to support students with other adults they trust.
8. Believe that the areas they go to (even home and school) are no longer safe.	8. Create a sense of safety by returning to normal, predictable routines as soon as possible. Remind them that they are still very safe. Point out ways that adults make the areas safe.
9. Feel guilty for not doing enough or for not being harmed.	9. Discuss that people can only do the best they can do. Give honest, accurate and age-appropriate information. Let children know that you will tell them the truth.
10. Search media for information about events in an attempt to find answers	10. Suggest they limit the use of media to maintain balance and perspective. Offer to help find answers to difficult questions.

If any of these problems persist and significantly interfere with children functioning, find out how to refer them for specialised help. Your school can help with this. Parents/Guardians should also be aware of their own reactions and seek support as needed.