

How to give good post-incident support

Using the initial letters of the word **'SUPPORT'** can help you remember what helps young people following an incident.

SUPPORT MEANS SUPPORT It is not about debriefing or educating. Any post-incident support you give should leave the young person feeling safe and accepted. Avoid interrogating them about what they have done. Instead, say you want to listen and help them when they are ready.

UNDERLYING REASONS Distressed behaviour is a means of communication. Listen and be curious about the issues behind the behaviour. Try to understand what it might be telling you about how the young person is feeling.

PLAN YOUR APPROACH Ask yourself, 'What do I need so that I can put the young person first?' Get to know the young person's triggers and what helps them to manage their distress. Ask them (and their family) what helps and plan to these (eg dim the lights or allow them to pace or throw a ball against the wall). Use the RRRN's 'My Support Plan' to help you with this.

PROVIDE STAFF WITH SUPPORT It's important to check that everyone is OK and that you and your colleagues get the help you need.

ORGANISE THE BEST PERSON TO HELP For support to be effective, it needs to be personalised and based on good relationships. The best people to provide post-incident support are therefore those who already have good relationships with the young person. However, bear in mind that you too might have been affected by what has happened. If so, it can be helpful to step away and allow a co-worker to take over. This gives you a chance to recover, while doing something else to support the young person's recovery (eg to make them a warm drink).

Manage your own **RESPONSES** Try to develop your powers of reflection and awareness of your own needs. 'Check in' with yourself before you offer support. Remember that you are working with young people who are in psychological (and even physical) pain, and that this can also include families and co-workers. Constant exposure to such pain can have a negative impact on you and make you vulnerable to reacting to a person's distress in a way that isn't helpful. If you think this is happening, it is important to seek the support of a supervisor or trusted colleague.

Get the **TIMING** right. Have you readied yourself to put the young person first? Do they need some time to themselves before they are ready to talk? Offer a choice, "Would it be better to talk about this now or later on?" Do they want frequent check-ins or a longer chat? You could ask, "Shall we have a short chat and maybe follow it up later on?" or "Would you like to have a longer conversation?"