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# Young Children Affected by Crisis

If you are worried about your child you might like to talk to someone who works with children, such as:

- ▶ Headteacher
- ▶ Class Teacher
- ▶ School Psychologist
- ▶ Family Centre Staff
- ▶ GP
- ▶ Social Worker

Alternatively you can speak to one of our Psychologists from this service.

This leaflet is also available in other formats and other languages on request.



## A Guide for Parents and Carers



Clackmannanshire Council  
[www.clacksweb.org.uk](http://www.clacksweb.org.uk)

## What is a Crisis?

The dictionary describes a crisis as “a time of danger or great difficulty”. Many children know about crisis through experiencing:

- ▶ Parental separation or divorce
- ▶ Witnessing parental violence
- ▶ Death of a relative or friend
- ▶ Serious illness of a relative or friend
- ▶ Physical or sexual abuse
- ▶ Serious accidents or fire
- ▶ Bullying

## How do children react to crisis?

There is no such thing as a typical reaction. Children react to crisis in different ways. Most children show changes in their behaviour.

These changes might appear immediately or not until weeks or months later. You might notice changes at home, school, or both.

Reactions are often short lived. How long they last depends on many factors including the nature of the crisis, their age, family circumstances and the support available from family and friends.

When changes appear immediately following the crisis they are easier to understand.

When the reactions appear much later their importance can easily be overlooked or misunderstood. Adults might come to believe that the child is just being difficult and unco-operative

## What should I look for?

If your child has been through a crisis the main things to look out for are changes in how they think, feel and behave.

## Thoughts and feelings

It can be difficult to notice changes in children's thoughts and feelings especially if they can't put them into words.

Following a crisis, children and adults often begin to think and feel differently about themselves and others.

Following a crisis children often think that they are responsible, that they did something wrong and they may blame themselves.

They may also feel unsafe and insecure; they may feel guilty, become easily upset by everyday events. They may need help to talk about and understand their feelings.

It's easier to spot changes in your child's behaviour. Others may notice too - friends, relatives and your child's teacher - so it's worth asking them.

Young children often express their fears and worries through their play - so observe their play.

If your child attends nursery or school ask staff about their play.

## Following a crisis your child might:

- ▶ Develop a fear of the dark or be afraid of being alone
- ▶ Become clingy; have problems sleeping; want to sleep in parent's room; have toileting accidents
- ▶ Become quiet and withdrawn
- ▶ Have difficulty concentrating
- ▶ Have unexplained tantrums

## How can I support my child?

If children are to overcome the effects of a crisis they need help to regain their sense of emotional safety.

Parents and other trusted adults can help by:

- ▶ Providing lots of reassurance and comforting
- ▶ Maintaining regular routines such as attending nursery or school
- ▶ Providing firm limits. They help to maintain a sense of security.
- ▶ Correcting any misunderstandings about the crisis
- ▶ Protecting from further fright or unnecessary separations
- ▶ Providing opportunities for play
- ▶ Listening to and accept their fears
- ▶ Listening to and accept their strong feelings and vivid memories of the crisis

## My child won't talk to me

After a crisis it is not unusual for children to keep things to themselves. Usually, this is because they do not want to upset adults. Sometimes it's because they blame themselves.