



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

STUDENTS RECOVERING FROM A CRISIS

*This information is designed to help teachers respond to students who may need support. It is **not** intended to be used as a diagnostic tool or to replace the use of formal assessments employed by mental health professionals. Additionally, it is important to consider individual differences, the context of the situation, and cultural and linguistic considerations.*

Teachers are an important part of facilitating student learning, well-being, and growth. Whether teaching remotely in a virtual learning environment (VLE), in person, or in a hybrid model, teachers can support students through crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, exposure to racial injustice, and other situations. Teachers can also play an important role in identifying students who may need to meet with school mental health professionals.

HOW MIGHT CHILDREN EXPOSED TO CRISIS BEHAVE?

- Across a multitude of situations, students may respond to the crises that they have experienced by showing abrupt changes in personal hygiene, sleep routines, weight, school performance, mood, disruptive behavior, and/or participation in activities.
- Pre-K and kindergarten students may appear sleepy, may withdraw from friends and typical routines, as well as display a reluctance to attend school, a reluctance to participate in activities, or cling to parents or caregivers once they arrive. In addition, a teacher may observe a regression in a student's behavior in the form of thumb-sucking, incontinence, or separation anxiety.
- Elementary students may be more irritable, aggressive, quiet, or clingy. They may have nightmares, avoid school, or withdraw from activities and friends. Children may show increased worry about family members or friends.
- Middle and high school students may display sleeping and eating disturbances, physical complaints, delinquent, self-seeking, or sabotaging behavior, or an increase in truancy or conflicts. They may have trouble concentrating or become agitated easily.

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?

No matter the setting—in the VLE or in-person, during summer break or while teaching summer school—here are nine DOs and DON'Ts for teachers to support their students recovering from a crisis:

DO	DON'T
Show caring by noticing changes in behavior, “You don’t seem like yourself lately. Is there something going on?” Invite students to connect via email, by calling their parents, or by mailing a note to their homes with a self-addressed stamped envelope for them to write you back.	Push for information, solicit it from their peers, or ask the student pointed questions.
Schedule regular check-ins with students/families you are concerned about, either virtually or in person.	Assume that no response to a check-in means you are not still needed.
Lend an ear. Give a casual invitation, like, “Let’s talk.”	Ignore concerns or minimize what has happened.
Be approachable by letting students know you are one of the adults here to keep them safe.	Tell children everything will be fine or the same.
Listen more than you talk.	Dominate the conversation.
Provide opportunities for students to express their feelings other than through talking. Invite them to write or draw about their experiences and feelings.	Ask them to recount explicit traumatizing details of the events.
Provide multiple different formats for students to connect with you. For example, in a VLE, you may choose to have cameras on or off, use the chat function, or connect via email.	Assume that just because a student keeps their camera off in a VLE or chooses to use chat instead of their voice that they don’t want to connect.
Remain calm when both referring to and discussing the events.	Describe these events as a catastrophe or disaster.
Keep to routines as much as possible.	Give surprise assignments or make last-minute schedule changes.

REFER STUDENTS TO FURTHER HELP IF NEEDED.

- Refer to school/district policies regarding crisis intervention and/or management.
- Contact school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other personnel as needed to share your concerns about students.

LINKS TO RESOURCES:

Natural disasters and public health crises

- Natural Disaster Resources (bit.ly/37TAMwz)
- Helping Children After a Natural Disaster: Tips for Parents and Educators (<https://bit.ly/3mcJ8Yu>)
- COVID-19 virtual learning and education: Thinking and learning (on.apa.org/37RDIda)
- COVID-19 virtual learning and education: Behavior management (on.apa.org/37VjlvK)
- COVID-19 virtual learning and education: Social and emotional learning (on.apa.org/3iXC5B7)

Emotional crises

- How to help in an emotional crisis (on.apa.org/3k9G0dz)
- Natural Disasters: Helping Kids During Crisis (bit.ly/3z5LlsE)
- APA Topics (apa.org/topics/index)

RELATED MENTAL HEALTH PRIMERS:

- Students Exposed to Trauma
- Students Experiencing Stress

LOCAL RESOURCES:
