

The Stages of Stress

Students who have experienced trauma or severe stress usually go through three different stages. In association with these stages, students have needs that should be met. If a child has experienced trauma or severe stress, look for these stages and attempt to deal with the student's emotions to the best of your ability and with professional help. These stages may occur at very different time periods for different children and may not occur in this order.

Stage One: Numbing

Symptoms include shock, sorrow, anger and guilt and/or automatic handling of routine.

To assist your student in his recovery, you can:

- Let others take care of his tasks.
- Relax your academic expectations for older students.
- Permit the child to be self-pitying, remote.
- Listen to the child and answer any questions.
- Validate the child's feelings — do not chide, scoff, belittle or joke about the child's feelings.
- Give the child opportunities to release anger as well as anxiety.
- Allow the child to depend on others.
- Communicate to the child, "It's not your fault."
- Respect time for talking, crying and silence.

Stage Two: Disorganization

Symptoms include a need to talk about the trauma at length, acute loneliness, disorganized and irrational thoughts, depression, aimlessness, apathy, extreme fatigue, anxiety, anger, tightness in throat and/or loss of sleep.

To be responsive to your student's needs you can:

- Encourage sharing, talking, interaction with friends and other children and family.
- Help the child sort out his values.
- Allow the child to be distracted.
- Permit the child to express his feelings.
- Create as much predictability in the classroom as possible.

Stage Three: Re-organization

Symptoms include feeling less intense, improved appetite, new interests, more energy, less anxious and/or acceptance of event.

To support the child as he re-engages into his life, you can:

- Increase activities.
- Encourage the child to play with friends and make new friends.
- Acknowledge the child's courage and strength in coping with trauma.

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