

APPENDIX 15

SELF-CARE HANDOUT FOR TEACHERS/PARENTS/CARERS

Parents, teachers, and other caregivers play a critical role in helping children and young people at this time. It is extremely important, however, for caregivers to monitor their own reactions and take care of their own needs.

Recent events may have impacted on you in terms of your feelings, your thoughts and your behaviour. You may/may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is normal. It is acceptable to cry. It is acceptable to smile. If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of others, remember everyone reacts differently.

You may have experienced or be experiencing some reactions as follows:

- a. **cognitive reactions** such as an inability to stop thinking about what has happened and trying to make sense of it.
- b. **physical reactions** such as extreme tiredness, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and other aches and pains, loss of appetite, and/or difficulty sleeping.
- c. **emotional reactions** such as excessive worry or anxiety, numbing, irritability, anger or rage, distressing thoughts or dreams.
- d. **behavioural/Social reactions** such as increase in alcohol consumption, withdrawal from contact with friends/family, an inability to complete/return to normal job responsibilities or normal pastimes/hobbies.

Be kind and understanding of your own needs. The following may help you through this difficult time:

- a. **physical self-care:** Maintain healthy eating habits and drink plenty of water; limit the use of alcohol or other substances; get adequate sleep and exercise. Treat yourself to a lunch/dinner out, walks, cinema, massage etc.
- b. **emotional self-care:** Know your limitations; recognise that your reactions are normal and occur frequently.
- c. **social care and connection:** Maintain normal daily routines; connect with trusted friends or family; talk through the events with other caregivers, friends, family or colleagues.

- DO express your emotions
- DO talk about what happened – share feelings and thoughts
- DO look to friends, family and colleagues for support
- DO try to keep your life as normal as possible
- DO try to keep to daily routine/recreation
- DO find time for physical exercise
- DO drink plenty of water and remember to eat – avoid junk food
- DO tune in to when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired (HALT)
- DO do things you enjoy and things that make you laugh
- DO write, draw, paint
- DO practice good sleep routines
- DO identify one method of relaxation that works for you - engage in a 5 minute relaxation or mindfulness exercise

- DON'T misuse alcohol, nicotine or other drugs to hide your feelings
- DON'T allow anger and irritability to mask your feelings
- DON'T bottle up feelings/emotions
- DON'T be afraid to ask for help
- DON'T think your feelings are signs of weakness.

Sometimes a traumatic event is so painful that professional support and/or medical assistance may be necessary. These feelings can be very common and simply indicate that the particular event is just too powerful for you to manage by yourself. Seeking help does not imply weakness or inadequacy. You can always access help by talking to someone - family, friends, GP, counsellors etc.

Useful Self-Care Strategies

Mindfulness is the process of bringing one's attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment. It may help to take a few minutes out every so often during the day to take a breath and clear your mind. One way of doing this is a simple mindfulness technique.

- Choose a natural object (your hand, a flower, an insect, the clouds) from within your immediate environment
- Focus on watching it for a minute or two
- Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at
- Simply relax into a harmony for as long as your concentration allows
- Look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time
- Visually explore every aspect of its shape
- Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its role and purpose