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PRIMARY ACADEMY

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Dear Parent

Please find below a few practical suggestions for helping your child cope with their recent exposure to the school fire:

1. Be aware of your own reactions to the event.

Children work out how to react to a situation by watching the significant adults around them, particularly parents and teachers. Try, if possible, to behave in a calm manner but of course do speak to someone about any worries you may have, away from your child.

2. Be prepared to speak about the event with your child

Your child may want to speak about the event at great length or may prefer not to talk about it at all. Feel free to ask questions, but do not force your child to speak if he or she does not want to. If your child wants to talk about feelings, be supportive and encouraging. Show your understanding and acceptance of these feelings by explaining that feelings such as fear, anger and guilt are all normal reactions to such an “abnormal” event. Children benefit greatly when we validate how they feel.

3. Be sensitive to your child’s reactions

Some children may have difficulty falling asleep or be afraid of the dark or not want to be left alone. All these are normal reactions after a difficult event. Be understanding and accepting. These symptoms usually disappear within a few weeks.

4. Encourage alternatives to talking

Drawing, writing and music are all creative ways a child can express how they feel and share their experiences.

5. Try to maintain a normal routine

This will strengthen your child’s sense of safety and let them know that although one aspect of their life has changed recently, there are lots of things that are predictable and within their control. Ways to do this is to keep to the same schedules you normally would, particularly bedtime and mealtimes. Of course, if normal routines are disrupted because of how your child is feeling, then do reach out for further advice and support.

6. Notice any signs of distress

An event like the recent school fire can trigger reactions in the immediate aftermath and for the next several weeks. These behaviors are normal after a traumatic event and are the child's way of coping with the trauma. However, if there is no change in the intensity and frequency of these behaviors after a month, or if they intensify, please let a professional know such as your child's GP, school staff.

Some Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Do ask your child if he or she has any questions and answer them in a forthright, matter-of-fact manner.
- Do convey confidence and reassure to your child that they can rely on adults to be responsible for their safety.
- Do encourage your child to share his or her distress with you at any time.
- Do allow for minor changes in your child's behaviour in the coming weeks. Anxiety about being alone or difficulties falling asleep are all normal reactions

Don't:

- Don't overwhelm your child with questions about what happened. Ask them once and then leave it.
- Don't be judgmental about your child's reactions. Show respect for their feelings and thoughts.
- Don't expect all children to respond in a similar manner. Remember that there are a wide range of reactions following a traumatic event.

Helpful websites:

Place2Be: Parenting Smart: How can I support my child after a traumatic event?

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/>

<https://anxietyhelpbox.com/managing-school-anxiety-advice-sheet-for-parents-and-carers/>