

Coláiste Pobail na Mainistreach

Bóthar na Mainistreach, An Port Mór, Portláirge, X91 PC91

Priomhoide: Michelle Ni Sheafraidh

Leas-Phriomhoide: Colm de Ris

Leas-Phriomhoide: Helen Ni Chonchubhair

Leas-Phriomhoide: Laura Ni Ghiolla Phádraig

Abbey Community College

Abbey Road, Ferrybank, Waterford, X91 PC91

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A chara,

The school has experienced the sudden death of our 1st year student, Billy Rockett. We are deeply saddened by this event and our thoughts are with the Rockett family.

At this time, you can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express feelings. All young people are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for young people to be fearful, anxious, or out of sorts. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reactions. Over the course of the coming days, please keep an eye on your child and allow them to express their feelings.

We have enclosed some information below from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post online.

Although classes have ended and state examinations are ongoing, members of our Student Support Team are available. If needed, please get in touch with us via the school office on 051-832930 or by email to info@abbeycommunitycollege.com

As a school community, our sincere condolences are with the Rockett family.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Yours faithfully,

Michelle Jefford
Principal



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HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

- Reach out – people do care
- Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy or mad
- It is acceptable to cry
- It is acceptable to smile
- If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently
- When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings perhaps with alcohol and drugs, this complicates matters rather than bringing relief
- Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
- Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you're not sure
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk
- Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time – keep busy
- Take time out – go for a cycle or kick a football
- Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen – like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits
- Use of social media can help but do not rely on it as your only source of support
- Useful websites: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, taking exercise, or talking
- Understand that there is a wide range of emotions associated with grief and that some children and young people may be more likely to express emotions like anger rather than sadness. Recognise that displays of risky behaviour, defiance or aggression may be your child's way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and/or fear they are experiencing. Notice their emotional state, help them label what they are feeling, and show empathy and understanding so they feel less alone with their emotions.
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back
- If you are out for a long time, telephone and reassure them
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services
- As well as advising your child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time. Useful website: www.webwise.ie