

Wednesday, 26 October 2016

Dreamworld tragedy: How to help with child anxiety

The tragic events at Dreamworld on the Gold Coast yesterday will be a source of anxiety and grief in adults and children alike. Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 telephone and online counselling service for children and young people is reminding young people and their families to look for warning signs of increased anxiety.

Children absorb tension and fear. National child and youth counselling service Kids Helpline is on hand to help those who are feeling increased anxiety.

According to Kids Helpline Manager Tony FitzGerald, while it's normal to feel anxiety and sadness for the victims and their families, for some children, ongoing media coverage can lead to more significant feelings of anxiety, worry and sadness.

"The 24 hour news cycle means it is almost impossible to shield young people from coverage on television, in newspapers, on the internet and in social media," Mr FitzGerald said.

"Young people will inevitably react in different ways and to different extents. Children may appear sad or scared, have troubled sleeping, or they may say that they have no feelings or are numb about an event, or use terms such as "It can't be real" or "It's not really happening". These are all normal reactions."

What can parents do?

- **Be there.** Let them know that it's OK and normal to be concerned and worried about this e.g. "Yes it's very sad isn't it?"
- **Have a discussion** about what happened and help them process what's occurred.
- **Try to limit their exposure to media stories around the tragedy.** Having them view or hear over and over what has occurred can re-traumatise them and build anxiety. It's OK to simply turn off the news for a while and use it as an opportunity to talk.
- **Try and find something positive to do.** Might simply be writing out a card, contributing to a fundraising campaign, or encouraging their school to do something.
- **Stick to your normal daily routine.** Kids draw a deal of comfort and safety around routine and consistency. Ensure they continue to socialise with friends.
- **Hugs and comfort.** Let them know they are loved and that they are safe.
- **Look after you.** Don't forget to look after you. This can be a stressful time for everyone.

Mr FitzGerald said Kids Helpline was expecting extra calls over this time, was prioritising Gold Coast and Brisbane contacts and would put on additional counsellors if needed.

"We are very aware of how hard this has hit our local community and we're here 24/7 for any child and young person who is worried, scared, confused, sad or just needs someone to talk to," Mr FitzGerald said.

"We encourage any child or young person to call us free **1800 55 1800** or contact us online at www.kidshelpline.com.au any time of the day or night."

KHL gives children and young people choices, support and someone to listen. KHL is Australia's only national 24/7 counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. It is a service of **yourtown** (formerly BoysTown) and is 72% funded by the **yourtown** Art Union, donations and corporate support. Federal and State Governments fund 28%.

ENDS

INTERVIEW/PHOTO/FILMING OPPORTUNITIES

- Tony Fitzgerald, Kids Helpline Centre Manager / Brendan Bourke, **yourtown** Head of Client Services
- KHL Counsellors / VNR footage available of Kids Helpline call centre

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