

March 15, 2019

Dear Peel District School Board Families,

We were all saddened by the tragic news coming out of New Zealand today. Our thoughts are with all those affected, including members of the Muslim community in Christchurch and around the world. We stand together in support of our Muslim community as they face yet another unacceptable and senseless act of violence.

We recognize the impact that events like this can have on each of us—children, staff, families and friends. Individuals react to situations like this in various ways. We may feel sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety and anger. Whatever you feel is okay.

The Peel District School Board’s social work team has prepared some tips to help you support your children and family at this time:

Tips for elementary students

- Recognize that children may become concerned that something bad will happen to them, their family or friends. Explain that safety measures are in place and reassure them that you and other adults will take care of them.
- If your child is not focused on the tragedy, do not dwell on it. Try to avoid having detailed adult conversations regarding the tragedy in front of children. However, be available to answer questions to the best of your ability. Young children may not be able to express themselves verbally. Pay attention to changes in their behaviour or social interactions.
- Limit exposure to media coverage. Images of a disaster or crisis can become overwhelming, especially if watched repetitively. Young children in particular may not be able to distinguish between images on television and their personal reality. Older children may choose to watch the news—be available to discuss what they see and to help put it into perspective.
- Maintain normal family routines as much as possible. Routine family activities, classes and friends can help children feel more secure.
- Be aware of your own needs. Don’t ignore your own feelings of anxiety, grief and anger. Talking to friends, family members, faith leaders and mental health counsellors can help.
- Let your children know you are sad. You will be better able to support them if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner.

Tips for secondary students

- Bring up the topic at a time and place where a discussion can occur. If there are distractions, a shortage of time or if either you or your teen is too tired or busy, it is likely the conversation will not be completed. If your teen is not focused on the tragedy, do not dwell on it. However, be available to answer questions to the best of your ability.
- It is normal for people to try to make sense of things when a serious loss occurs. Allow your teen to share his or her ideas and speculations. Help them to separate what they know from what they are guessing about.

- Limit exposure to media coverage. Images of a disaster or crisis can become overwhelming, especially if watched repetitively. Teenagers may choose to watch the news—be available to discuss what they see and to help put it into perspective.
- Maintain normal family routines as much as possible. Routine family activities, classes and friends can help children and teens feel more secure.
- Be aware of your own needs. Don't ignore your own feelings of anxiety, grief and anger. Talking to friends, family members, faith leaders and mental health counsellors can help.
- Let your teen know you are sad. You will be better able to support them if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner.

As always, if you are concerned about your child/teen and feel they need additional support, please contact your principal or vice-principal.

Our greatest resource is kindness—the care and compassion we have for students, families and each other. Thank you for your support during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Joshua". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "J".

Peter Joshua
Director of Education