



# SUPPORTING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WELLNESS

# **WESTERN KENTUCKY**

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Natural Disaster Anniversary Kit for Schools

November 2022

**TEAM**  
**KENTUCKY**<sup>®</sup>

CABINET FOR HEALTH  
AND FAMILY SERVICES

# We Are Here for You

Anniversaries of traumatic events can bring up unavoidably strong emotions, thoughts and behavior for students, families, staff and communities.

As we approach this holiday season, prepare for the anniversary of the December 2021 Tornado to impact your school community in a variety of ways.

In this kit you will find information, tips, guides and resources on supporting yourselves, staff, parents and students through this anniversary.

Please feel free to use the handouts, resources activities and information needed to support your staff, parents, students and communities.



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# Common Anniversary Reactions

The anniversary of a disaster can provide a place for emotional healing. It is important to understand that it is common to have reactions even years after a disaster. Help educate and support staff to recognize common reactions and ways to support survivors.



## **Anniversary reactions may include:**

- Restlessness
- Poor concentration and memory
- Trouble making decisions
- Increased emotionality
- Mood and/or behavior changes
- Irritability and interpersonal conflicts
- Tearfulness
- Increased depression or anxiety
- Isolating from others
- Loss of interest in things

# Healthy Coping Activities

- Exercise
- Meditate
- Make a craft
- Write in journal, poetry, stories, etc.
- Draw, color, doodle, paint
- Connect with positive friends, mentors, trusted adults
- Eat healthy
- Stay hydrated
- Sing and/or dance
- Play with a pet
- Play with fidgets, modeling clay or play-doh
- Make favorite healthy snack
- Take a nap
- Take a hot shower or relaxing bath
- Engage in your favorite outdoor activity
- Play a game with friends
- Make a favorite songs playlist
- Get together with friends and do a fun activity
- Go to or watch a movie
- Text or call a friend
- Cook and/or eat a meal with a friend or family member
- Read a book to yourself or read to others



# Ways to Support Calm Behaviors

- Take Slow, Deep Breaths
- Drop your jaw, drop your shoulders, drop your stomach
- Focus on loosening up parts of your body that are tense
- Close your eyes, picture yourself being calm
- Count backwards from 10 to 1
- Challenge or fact check your thoughts by talking to a trusted person
- Go outside and get some fresh air
- Write or journal your thoughts
- Drink some water or get a snack



# Calming Activities Families Can Do Together

- **Coloring and Painting:**
  - Ask your child to draw something they did at school today. When they are finished ask questions about that and other things they did.
- **Puzzles:**
  - This can be a good engaging activity for all ages. This activity helps with communication and teamwork.
- **Reading together:**
  - This can be you reading a book to your child or reading a book together with older children.
- **Play with modeling clay or playdoh:**
  - Have your child pick an animal, food, thing, etc. and you both try and create that with the clay or playdoh.
- **Exercise Together:**
  - Go for a walk or do a yoga class together.

Please see fun family crafts on the next few pages

# Let's Make Your Own Calm Jar!

## Materials Needed:

- Glass or plastic jars with lids, 16-ounce
- 1/2 cup glitter glue or clear glue
- Distilled water
- High-temperature hot glue gun, optional
- 1-2 teaspoons glitter



## Instructions:

1. Pour 1/2 cup of distilled water into the jar.
2. Pour 1/2 cup of glitter glue or clear glue into the jar.
3. Add 1-2 teaspoons of extra glitter to the jar.
4. Fill up the remainder of the jar with distilled water.
5. If desired, use a hot glue gun to squeeze a ring of glue around the lid of the jar. Press the lid onto the jar and secure with the metal ring.
6. Shake the jar well to distribute the glitter.
7. Your DIY glitter jar is complete!



# What Does The Calm Jar Do?

When kids are stressed, sad or angry, it is natural for them to have a fight, flight or freeze response. This makes it difficult for them to make rational decisions. Encouraging mindfulness through activities like the calm jar. Practicing mindfulness regularly helps reduce stress and increase mental wellness and self-control. Have fun making a glitter calm jar together to use at home or school.



- Invite your child to sit down comfortably.
- Encourage them to shift their gaze to the swirling glitter, breathing deeply in and out as they watch it sink to the bottom of the jar.
- Next, invite them to notice the calm feeling moving through their body as they breathe.
- Perhaps their feet feel heavy and warm, and that feeling is moving up towards their shoulders.
- As they breathe, ask them to notice how their heartbeat feels steady and their body temperature feels just right. All the while breathing in...and out.
- As the glitter settles and the water clears, so will their thoughts, feelings, and body.



# Dried Bean Stress Balls

## Materials Needed:

- Any type of dried bean or rice
- 3-4 latex balloons
- Water bottle
- Scissors



## Instructions:

1. Cut off the bottom of the water bottle to make a funnel.
2. Blow up ONE balloon to stretch it out.
3. Place the balloon around the neck of the bottle.
4. Use the bottle as a funnel to pour beans inside. Go ahead and stuff the balloon full, smashing them in with your finger or a wooden spoon handle.
5. Snip the balloon OFF the bottle.
6. Cut the neck off 2 or 3 more balloons.
7. Place a balloon over the bean ball, making sure the opening of the first balloon is centered in the BOTTOM of the balloon.
8. Layer one or two more balloons, always making sure the openings do not overlap.

**Note:** Three layers of balloons should be good enough, but four is more sturdy.

# Homemade Playdough

## Materials Needed:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup water
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 1/3 cup salt
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- Food coloring (optional)



## Instructions:

1. Mix together all of the ingredients in a 2-quart saucepan.
2. Cook over low/medium heat, stirring.
3. Continue stirring until the mixture is thickened and begins to gather around the spoon.
4. Remove the dough onto wax paper or a plate to cool.

**Note:** Cool completely before storing in a ziplock bag or sealed container.

**Once you're done, have your child pick something to create and work together to make it! Have fun!**

# Ways Schools Can Support Students and Staff Through Anniversaries



- **Acknowledge the anniversary and the range of responses:** Use clear language that acknowledges the past and the present.
  - *Example:* “We know that we may all be remembering what happened a year ago. A lot has changed, and we may still miss things the way they used to be. It’s okay to feel upset when we remember what we’ve lost. And it’s okay to feel proud of all that we have accomplished since then. There is no right or wrong way to feel.”
- **Maintain routines as much as possible:** Consistency and predictability are critical means of reassuring students and staff and helping them to stay regulated during times of stress.
- **Adjust expectations:** You may not be able to cover as much academic content as quickly during this time.
  - You may need to repeat content more.
  - You may find that students and staff are having trouble with concentration, memory, integrating new ideas, thinking creatively, making decisions, or executing complex tasks.
  - Slow down, take your time, take frequent breaks, and focus on one thing at a time.
  - Remember, these changes are temporary and will likely improve as the stress response to the anniversary decreases.

# Supporting Students and Staff Who Are Grieving During Anniversaries

**Recommended:** Schools should plan to have more mental health services and supports available for staff and students on or around anniversaries.

## Ways schools can support grieving students and staff during anniversaries:

- **Allow room for grieving:** Anniversaries often bring up powerful feeling of loss of people, places, or things, as well as the loss of hopes and dreams.
- **Give space and normalize:** Support people where they are. There is not right or wrong way to grieve.
- **Provide time and space for healthy coping:** Allow people to process the anniversary, while encouraging healthy coping.



## School Initiated Memorials Are Not Recommended:

Avoid formal all-school memorials. Not everyone feels comfortable with memorial services. Instead, create a sense that school is a safe place and have small conversations as needed with individual students or classes; always allow students to be quiet or be excused from those conversations as appropriate.

# Helping Children and Youth Cope with Natural Disaster Anniversaries

- Help children & youth recognize disaster reminders and understand their responses are normal
- Support children & youth to use calming strategies like breathing, mindfulness, grounding and refocusing to cope with trauma reminders
- Help children & youth find words and other ways to express their strong feelings and thoughts
- Recognize and celebrate accomplishments children & youth have had over the year
- Provide opportunities for children & youth to make a difference in their communities, their families and their own lives
- Limit media exposure
- Remember all children & youth respond differently; allow them space to experience the anniversary in ways that work for them

BE KIND  
TO YOUR  
MIND

# Mindfulness and Movement

## Ways Schools Can Implement Mindfulness and Movement Breaks

- Try starting a day, a class or meeting with a meeting of deep breathing or grounding activity.
- Use these strategies when you need to transition from one thing to another.
- Make it a part of the regular routine during the school day.
- Support parents and caregivers to practice these breaks at home.
- Give time and space for students and staff to practice mindfulness.
- Take regular stretch and movement breaks.



**Self-regulation strategies are helpful to prevent and respond to reactions to trauma and reminders.**

# Taking Care of You

## Parents and Caregivers Navigating Natural Disaster Anniversaries

- **Acknowledge your emotions and thoughts:** Talk, write, sing or express them with trusted others and remember whatever you are feeling is okay
- **Be gentle with yourself:** Set realistic expectations and remember it may not be as easy to multi-task, make decisions, or accomplish complex tasks
- **Take care of your body:** Sleep, eat well, get some physical activity
- **Take care of your mind:** Find time for quiet and reflection, try a few minutes of mindfulness each day
- **Maintain a routine:** Consistency and predictability help mitigate stress responses
- **Connect with others:** Offer to help others, and accept kindness and help from others
- **Limit media exposure:** This can be highly activating and distressing even for adults
- Seek professional help for yourself or your children if needed



# Tips for Parents and Caregivers

## Helping Your Child Navigate Natural Disaster Anniversaries

- **Anticipate reminders will occur:** It's normal everyone to respond to reminders with strong emotions and thoughts
- **Be honest and acknowledge reminders:** Talk about feelings, thoughts, memories and losses related to the tornado with children to help your child understand these are normal
- **Practice and use calming strategies with your child:** Try deep breathing, muscle relaxation, grounding, and mindfulness activities
- **Maintain normal routines:** This provides a sense of psychological and physical safety
- **Limit media exposure:** Be aware of what your child is watching or reading regarding the anniversary. Limit how much media coverage is being viewed. Have a conversation with your child to discuss and process what they are seeing and feeling.
- **Provide extra support as needed:** You may need to spend extra time reassuring your child at bedtime, or when separating from you
- **Adjust expectations:** You may need to simplify or repeat instructions, or you may see some immature behavior
- **Connect with others:** Connections build support and resilience
- **Do something to help others:** Helping others helps children and youth have a sense of agency, feel valuable, and build resilience
- **Celebrate accomplishments:** Remind your children that they continue to live their lives in lots of successful ways



# Additional Resources Available for Support

- [NCTSN resource Tips for Families on Addressing the Anniversary](#)
- [Lifeline Children's Services](#)
- [Disaster Distress Helpline:](#)
  - 1-800-985-5990
- [Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988](#)
- [SAMHSA](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services): Disaster Anniversaries
- [SAMHSA DTAC](#)
- [The Dougy Center](#)
- [Ready Gov](#)
- [Project Recovery Kentucky](#)
- <https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Crisis-and-Emergency-Response-Resources.aspx>

