

Supporting Young People After a Tragedy

This document was created as part of an open day of developing resources for Quakers on January 14, 2017. Please send edits and suggestions to improve this to lisa@neym.org

Step 1: Take Care of Yourself

Please take care of yourself. It is much easier to be supportive of young people and others when you are in a good space. We offer the following for self-care:

- Plan to do less. When we are overwhelmed, triggered, or upset, we can't function in the same ways we normally do. To the extent possible, prioritize drinking water, healthy eating, sleep, time with loved ones, exercise, and prayer.
- Use your break time to take a break. Seek out spaces that are relaxing—a quiet room, outside in nature, the bath tub, etc. Use your break time to really take a break—sit quietly, listen to soothing music, or read something (on paper) that is grounding. Do one thing at a time and give yourself time to do it.
- The APA and other clinical groups highly recommend limiting social media and media exposure as those activities generally heighten stress and anxiety around challenging issues. Talking to people in person can help lower stress and anxiety.
- If you need a break, ask for support to get one. Be gentle with yourself and the young people you are with.
- When checking in with another adult, be clear about what you need. You may just need to vent, you may want feedback or affirmation, you may want problem-solving, or simply a hug. Being clear about what you need allows others to best support you.

Step 2: Gauge Where the Young People Are

Some youth may be upset, some youth may not care at all, and some youth may not let us know what they are thinking or feeling. Our job is to provide space for youth to express themselves and get support.

- Start with a check-in in a circle, do a free-write, open with worship-sharing, or have youth share in small groups.

- Give space for youth to name feelings they have, while reminding everyone that it is OK for people to have different feelings or be unable to identify feelings.
- Help youth who are having big feelings identify resources: people they can talk to, ways to calm their bodies, using art or journaling to express themselves, etc.

Step 3: Provide Accurate Information

There is a lot of misinformation out there and the media frames things for the most intense impact. Give space for youth to share what their concerns and understandings are and then correct misinformation.

- Make sure youth know how adults—both those in positions of authority and everyday people—responded to help.
- Reframe statistics to be accurate for reality. It is not that 2% of Americans supported Jill Stein, it is that 2% of voting adults voted for Jill Stein—that is a very different percentage of people in our country.
- If youth are worried about specific issues that the trigger event connects to (violence, discrimination, deportation, etc.) list the organizations and groups that are working, locally and nationally, to protect those rights, ensure safety, etc. Help youth identify people they know who are working to keep them safe and secure.
- Only address the concerns that youth are raising; we do not need to introduce new concerns or fears. Rather, we calmly address the ones that they do have.

Step 4: Pivot to Action We Can Take

Once youth have had a chance to process feelings and you have had the opportunity to address misinformation, pivot the discussion to what we can do, both politically and for ourselves.

- Offer an age-appropriate list of self-care practices or make a brainstorm list of healthy ways to care for oneself. Invite youth to take some time to practice something from the list.
- Invite the group to think about how youth can care for each other. This might be more time in circles, time for specific affirmations, check-in phone calls between meetings, etc.

- Explain how youth can call our Congressional Reps and Senators to express our views and request their advocacy for issues we care about.
- Help youth identify actions they can take on the issues they are most concerned about.
- It is fine to share an issue that you care about and what you do to move that issue forward as an example. Ask youth to share examples of other people they know who are working for positive change.

Step 5: Prayer and Silence

Make some extra time for closing silence.

- Invite or offer vocal prayer for both those directly impacted by the triggering event and for those present.
- Ask if anyone wants hands laid on them during silence or prayer. Safe physical/spiritual touch can be a powerful way to release stress and help people feel connected and held.
- Singing together is also an incredibly soothing and community-building activity for many.

Step 6: Check-In with a Colleague or Friend

We all process in different ways and at different speeds, make sure that you take time at the end of working with youth to check-in with another adult. Youth may say things—or not—that we find upsetting and talking those things through with another adult allows us to be supportive of the youth. Be gentle with yourself and offer support to others as you are able.