DOWN SYNDROME NEW SOUTH WALES

Helping Me Understand Distressing Event

This Helping Me Understand sheet supports people with Down syndrome or intellectual disability to understand an important topic with support.

Part 1 are for families, carers, and support workers. They give guidance on supporting a person with Down syndrome and explains the topic of the information sheet.

Part 2 uses in clear and easy- to-understand language and can be read together. The language can be adapted to suit different ages, communication styles and support needs.

Supportive Communication Tips

» Use short, clear sentences and talk about one idea at a time.

» Use visual learning supports. Use real life things that relate to the topic, such as phones, apps, forms, letters, photos, calendars, pictures or objects.

» Use real life example to support understanding, avoid general and vague terms.

» Show the person what to do, then practise together.

» Repeat key messages over time. The person may need to hear and the same message many times.

» Give extra time to think and answer.
Do not rush.

» Check understanding by asking the person to show you what they would do, or to choose from clear options.

» Some people may understand more than they can express using words. Give them different ways to communicate, such as choosing between pictures, gestures such as pointing or communication aids if needed.

Published: October 2026

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Helping Me Understand Distressing Event

Part 1:

Distressing events are experiences that may cause significant emotional stress, fear, and impact someone's ability to cope. They can be personally related or feel close to home, either geographically or culturally, even when they do not happen in Australia.

Even if you do not know someone who was directly affected, they can still cause significant distress.

Common types of distressing events:

- Natural disasters
- Accidents
- Violence and assault
- War
- Loss and grief

Supporting a Person with Down syndrome through a Distressing Event

Possible reactions

A person with Down syndrome may:

- Seek repeated reassurance or ask the same questions.
- Express increased worry about safety or public spaces.
- Spend increased time online engaging with news or social media.
- Experience disrupted sleep or heightened anxiety.
- Show changes in mood or behaviour.

These responses are common and reflect the understanding and processing of what has happened.

How you can support them

Supportive strategies include:

- Providing reassurance about current safety.
- Acknowledging that what occurred was wrong and upsetting.
- Encouraging expression through conversation, social stories, drawing, or other preferred methods.
- Answering questions honestly, without unnecessary detail.
- Focusing on the actions of the helpers, community, and positive responses.
- Maintaing and limiting exposure to distressing media content.
- Checking in regularly, even if distress is not obvious.

Helping Me Understand Distressing Event

Support Navigating News and Social Media Exposure

Ongoing news coverage and algorithims can increase exposure to content, including social media platforms. This means if a person clicks on a story, they may begin to see more stories, videos, and images about the same topic.

People may be exposed to information that is untrue.

This media exposure can contribute to inceased distress, confusion or feelings of being overwhelmed.

Repeated exposure can increase distress.

» Encourage breaks from social media.
» View or discuss posts together.
» Use 'see less of this' settings.
» Mute or hide upsetting content.

When to seek additional support

Most grief responses are normal and reduce over time with care and support.

If distress persists, escalates, or begins to affect daily functioning, professional support may be helpful.

Support services in Australia

Intellectual Disability Mental Health Connect
idmhconnect.health

Mental Health Line **1800 011 511**
Lifeline **13 11 14**
Beyond Blue **1300 22 4636**
Black Dog Institute
blackdoginstitute.org.au
If someone is in immediate danger, call **000**



Part 2: Helping Me Understand

Read this together

You can read this together.
You can take your time.

What happened

» Something terrible and frightening happened at [name of incident].
» Someone did something very wrong.
» This was not okay.
» Emergency services and many other people helped.
» Many people were kept safe.
» Many people were saved.

Bad things and good people

Yes, bad things happened because of these people.

But many good people helped.

People who helped included:

» Police and ambulance officers.
» Doctors and nurses.
» Shop workers and security.
» People nearby who helped others.

They acted quickly and bravely.
They helped people get to safety and helped people who were hurt.

How you might feel

» Feel sad and upset.
» Feel confused.
» Feel angry.
» Feel scared or unsafe.
» Feel worried or nervous.
» Think about what happened a lot.
» Have trouble sleeping.
» Want to stay close to people you trust.
» Grief feels different for everyone.

Being online

When you watch or click on posts online, the app learns what you look at.
This means you see more stories or videos about the same thing.

To help:

» Look at less of this content.
» Take breaks from social media.
» Choose “see less of this” option in settings.
» Mute or hide upsetting posts.

If you need support with your social media settings, you can ask a parent/carer, friend or other person close to you.

Things that can help you feel calmer

» Listening to music.
» Slow breathing.
» Going for a walk.
» Holding something comforting.
» Sitting with someone you trust.
» Doing something you enjoy.

A final message

Something bad happened.
» But many good people helped.
» Many people were kept safe.
» Strong feelings are normal.
» You are not alone.

Help is available. You can ask for help to call someone or talk to someone.

If someone is in immediate danger, call **000**

Notes

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