



Supporting Children and Young People impacted by the Earthquake in Syria/Turkey

Advice for School Staff

Hearing about natural disasters like the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, or wildfires or other weather events has become more commonplace and frequent. This news can cause different reactions and emotions in us all. We feel for the people who might be hurt, have lost relatives and whose homes and the communities that are damaged. Some children and young people in your school may have been affected by the recent, earthquake in Turkey/Syria as they may be children and young people:

- Of Syrian and Turkish heritage;
- Who are seeking protection in Ireland (asylum seekers and refugees particularly those from Syria);
- Who have experienced separation and loss;
- Who have pre-existing risk factors, for example mental health issues, previous traumatic experiences; family stress
- Who have additional needs;
- Who are experiencing a high level of anxiety related to climate change.

When children and young people's sense of safety is threatened, a secure and trusted relationship with key adults will help them to process and manage how they are thinking and feeling. Adults can help support children and young people during this time by fostering resilience and promoting recovery using the five key principles (adapted from Hobfoll et al., 2007) that were outlined by NEPS over the last number of years in supporting all members of the school community during Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine. These are:



- Promoting a sense of safety;
- Promoting a sense of calm;
- Promoting a sense of belonging and connectedness;
- Promoting a sense of self-efficacy and community-efficacy;
- Promoting a sense of hope.



Bearing these five principles in mind adults can support children and young people to navigate worrying and uncertain times in the following ways:

- **Model a sense of calm** – Children and young people look to the adults in their lives to guide them on how to cope with worrying and stressful events. If the adults in a child or young person's life are overly worried, their anxiety may rise. Equally, when adults are calm it helps to reduce children and young people's anxiety. Be aware of what you are saying if talking to other adults about the earthquake in the company of children and young people.
- **Maintain routines** – Support children and young people to maintain everyday routines. Engaging in activities that they enjoy may help to reduce any stress or anxiety.
- **Communication with parents/guardians** – Ask their parent/guardians how they understand the situation and how they are coping. Share any concerns you may have with the child/young person's family.
- **Give information in reassuring ways** – Children and young



people will have different understandings of what is going on. They need factual, age-appropriate information about the situation. While not minimising the terrible losses, try also to focus on the rescues and the efforts of the rescue workers. Advise them that big earthquakes like this are rare and not likely in Ireland. Let their questions and their age act as a guide to what and how much information to provide. Always consult with parents/guardians in relation to information sharing.

- Very **young children** need brief, simple information and reassurance that they are safe.
- **Older children** may need help to separate reality from rumour and fantasy. Having the facts can help them feel a sense of control. They may also be concerned with their mortality, fairness and moral and/or ethical issues. Give them space and opportunity to discuss these in a supportive and safe way.
- **Limit exposure if possible**– When in school limit what they see and hear on the news. Images and reporting of war can be upsetting and frightening. Advise parents to manage this carefully at home. Approach curriculum topics that deal with natural disasters sensitively.
- **Foster a sense of control** – Encourage children and young people to think about small ways they might help, e.g. fundraising.
- **Monitor vulnerable groups** – For the vulnerable groups listed above watch for signs of distress or anxiety e.g. clinginess or attention seeking behaviour. Check in with parents/ guardians if concerned.
- **Familiarise yourself with** –Look, Listen & Link – A model of Psychological First Aid (PFA) to help teachers support students which has been adapted into Arabic and Turkish and is available gov.ie - [National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\) resources and publications \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie)
- **Tend to your own wellbeing needs** – Remember you are an



important support to children and young people at this time. Be mindful of your own wellbeing and how you are feeling and take steps to manage your own self-care. See supports available from the EAS service Spectrum Life [here](#).

For further advice on supporting children and young people, click on the links below:

- Wellbeing-Guidance-documents-for-parents-students-and-schools
 - Managing your thoughts and feelings
 - Dealing with Anxiety
 - Coping with Fear
 - Managing Panic
- Responding to Critical Incidents NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools
 - Children's Understanding and Reaction to Death According to Age (R6)
 - Stages of Grief (R7)
 - How to Cope When Something Terrible Happens (R8)
 - Reactions to a Critical Incident (R9)
 - Ways to help your Child through this difficult time (R12)
- NEPS Resources