

Big worries



Some worries



Tiny worries



No worries at all



8 CRISES AND COPING



Life is not only blissful happiness; it also brings with it worries and sorrows. Sometimes children and families face major, life-changing crises. Children's worries and grief come up in day care and child health clinics. It is the adults' responsibility to encourage children to talk about their concerns. Mental health skills, recognising and using coping strategies and the skill to find help serve as protective factors in crises and the hardships life may bring. These are skills adults must teach children.

What kinds of worries do children tell you about? How do you help children and families who are going through a crisis? What kind of support do you get in your work community to boost your own coping?

Worries and sorrows

Adults act as an example for children on how to talk about worries and share them. By observing adults, children learn what you can talk about and with whom. Listening to children's worries, discussing them and giving encouragement relieve anxiety. Thus, adults should create mutual time that allows children to talk about their issues. Often worries come up when children are doing things and chatting with adults. Children's worries may seem inconsequential for adults, but for them, they may be significant and a burden on their mind. Individual, genuine and sensitive discussions with children and their parents help lighten up this burden.

Crises and coping skills

Crises faced by families and adults always reflect on children. Sudden events such as parents' divorce, a death of a loved one, illness or a move might cause crises in families. Crises generate different emotional reactions, and children experience the same feelings of emptiness, confusion, sadness, anger and disbelief as adults. All emotions are allowed and possible in a crisis.

In difficult, strenuous situations, children need the presence and support of adults above all else. Safe and familiar routines provide security for children in difficult circumstances. Daily rhythm, playing, friends and familiar adults provide the feeling of continuity. Doing enjoyable things alone or with adults promote

children's coping. An important and safe soft toy can also help make children feel more secure.

Children's grief

Children should be listened to when they are feeling sad, whether the cause is small or big. Their sadness may be connected to losses or changed circumstances. Grief may manifest itself in many different ways, and often, when a family faces a crisis, children are left alone with their feelings overshadowed by adults' grief. Adults may think that asking about children's grief or talking about it will deepen their sadness and confuse their daily life. Silence and hiding or glossing over the truth, however, often makes children feel insecure and unsettles their trust in parents and adults. If parents are unable to support their children in their grief, it is important that they have some other adult by their side, supporting them. There is no need nor is it even possible to remove or cure children's grief. Children should have opportunities to express their sadness in safe, calm situations, and in case of the death of a family member, they should be encouraged to recount their memories of the person who has passed away. Adults do not always have the answers to children's questions, but even difficult topics should not be rejected or silenced. Children can be told that sometimes there isn't just one correct answer to a question.

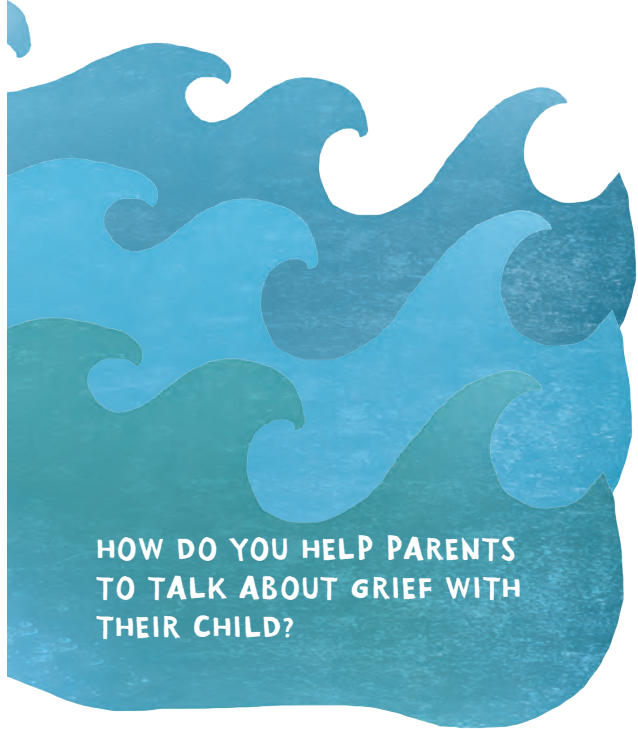
Children may not show their grief and shock in the way adults expect them to, and thus, it may be difficult to know how children experience crises. The way in which children react to a crisis depends on the child's age and temperament, among other things. Children are good at sensing how the adults around them are feeling. Verbalising emotions makes it easier for children to understand and put events into context. Depending on the age and developmental phase of children, it may be a good idea to avoid metaphors such as being asleep or eternal rest – they may confuse children or provoke new fears.

Sometimes adults may think that children have gotten over the death of a loved one, because their way of grieving is different from adults. Children may play and laugh one moment and the next, miss the one who has died and think about death. Children process their grief mainly through play. The grieving process for children, just like adults, takes time: it is gradual, and children may re-experience their grief even after long periods of time.

Closeness during crises

Adults often have a strong desire to protect children from the pain and negative emotions that crises provoke. It is important that adults discuss events and emotions with children in age-appropriate terms. When adults talk with children about their own emotions, they give children the right to experience and express different feelings. Children do not forget shocking experiences just because they are not mentioned. When the topic is discussed with children, it is important to ensure that they understand what has happened and what might follow. Avoiding difficult issues and denying them is a normal coping strategy following a shocking event, but staying silent about emotional pain and losses may, if prolonged, multiply problems.

In a safe and open climate, children can face and deal with difficult experiences through play and storytelling. Games, stories and spending time together promote children's healing. Children need affection, intimacy and shared moments to heal and feel better.



HOW DO YOU HELP PARENTS
TO TALK ABOUT GRIEF WITH
THEIR CHILD?

Parents and other important adults, who are facing a crisis, must remember that children do not need to help exhausted adults; it is not their duty. The airplane safety instructions, which tell you to place an oxygen mask on yourself first before helping children and others, work as an excellent reminder for those going through a crisis. Adults must attend to their own coping and wellbeing, because an adult who cannot function is not a safe adult.

Coping skills

Daily rhythm and routines provide safety and security to children and adults going through a crisis. Parental strategies for dealing with a crisis impact their children's ability to cope. Parents should acknowledge their own resources, and they should be guided to listen to their emotions and coping and encouraged to find help, when needed. Often it is enough for children to have even just one functional and safe relationship with an adult they trust and who gives them positive attention and understands them, even when their family is going through difficult times and crises. However, there are situations in which children's worries are so huge and frightening that a short encounter and conversation are not sufficient. In such circumstances, it is important to find professional help for the child and the family.

It is important for adults to accept their own and children's emotional reactions and give them enough time. Children might suppress their emotions if they sense that their parents' resources are running low.

Everyone has their own strategies for coping with crises. The support of the wider family is often necessary to ensure that daily life continues despite the crisis. However, many people feel that they get the best understanding and help from peer support. Sometimes, professional help is required to enhance coping in a crisis. Early childhood educators and child health clinic professionals can support families in crises and guide them to find professional help. It is also of primary importance that those who support children and families look after their own coping and boundaries. Having information about and an understanding of the different stages of the event may help analyse the situation and promote day-to-day coping.

Dealing with a crisis is personal, and the time it takes to get through a crisis cannot be estimated in advance. Adjusting to the change takes time and space. Crises are part of life, and successful crisis processing can improve self-knowledge and increase resources as well as bring families together.

Those working with families need professional courage and sensitivity to bring up any concern a child or a family has evoked and if necessary, to ensure that the family receives professional help. It is important to be bold and ask how the family is doing and provide time for them to open up. People do not often discuss their issues, unless they get asked directly and the person asking shows genuine interests and offers an opportunity and the time to discuss the topic. Together, you can find solutions and look for parties to turn to for support and help. It is important to encourage parents to tell those who work with their children in day care about any crises they have experienced. Anticipation helps adults who work with children to deal with children's emotional reactions, even when the reactions are strong.



HOW TO BRING UP YOUR
CONCERNS FOR A CHILD?

HOW TO DISCUSS ANY
WORRIES YOU MAY HAVE
ABOUT THE COPING OF
THE ADULTS IN THE
FAMILY?

Adults supporting the mental health of children experiencing a crisis

- Ensure that the child feels safe throughout the day.
- Stay close to and cuddle the child.
- Spend time and play with the child.
- Stay tuned to when the child wants to discuss things.
- Talk about the event with the child.
- Listen to the child without interrupting, and only afterwards correct any misunderstandings.
- Help the child find words for emotions.
- Build a connection with the family.
- Ask the adults in the family about their coping, thus, showing empathy.
- Encourage the family to get in touch with professionals to ensure that they have sufficient and continued help.
- Look after your own coping and go through work-related issues in confidential peer discussions or work guidance.
- Bringing up a crisis and building a connection with a child is the responsibility of an adult.



Bring up a crisis or worries

- What is your biggest worry here and now?
- What feels like the worst thing about this situation?
- What could help you here and now?
- What could help you feel safe?
- Have some things been left unresolved? What kinds of things?
- Are you going through things that have been said or told to you? What things?
- Have you got something to ask about a past or future event? Such as?

Phases of a crisis

- These may come together or separately.

SHOCK PHASE

- Comes at the start of a crisis and aims to protect the mind of the knowledge or experience that feels unbearable. The physical reactions the events stir are strong. This stage lasts from a few minutes to a few days.

REACTION PHASE

- Hidden emotions begin to emerge. Life seems to have been shattered and the future seems difficult. Guilt, fear and depression are common feelings. The events come up over and over again and come into dreams.

PROCESSING PHASE

- Strong reactions to the events become fewer. People think about the significance of the events in relation to themselves. Life may feel meaningless at this stage, but the future starts to gradually take shape.

REORIENTATION PHASE

- Joy returns to life and other things start replacing the loss. The life experience that caused the crisis becomes part of life.

Help children find and strengthen their own coping strategies

- Discuss, listen to, ask about and answer children's questions.
- Listen to children's feelings and understand and accept them.
- Help children express their feelings in many different ways.
- Take a moment to discuss with children their safe adults and together name as many safe adults in the children's support network as possible.
- Support children to find their way to the world of imagination, stories and play.
- Create a feeling of hope for children.
- Guide children to exercise, play and relax.

Coping strategies

The more coping strategies people have, the stronger they remain when they face crises. It is important to acknowledge what kinds of coping strategies you use and how they could be strengthened.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Spending time with friends.
- Accepting support from others.
- Talking about personal problems.
- Sharing experiences with others.

AFFECTIVE EXPRESSION

- Laughing, crying and rejoicing.
- Discussing personal emotions.
- Expressing self and personal emotions.

IMAGINATION/CREATIVITY

- Using imagination.
- Thinking positively.
- Listening to self.
- Looking for new ways to operate.

BELIEF SYSTEMS

- Looking for safety and hope in religion, beliefs and values.
- Thinking about the significance of life.
- Praying, finding peace and reflection.

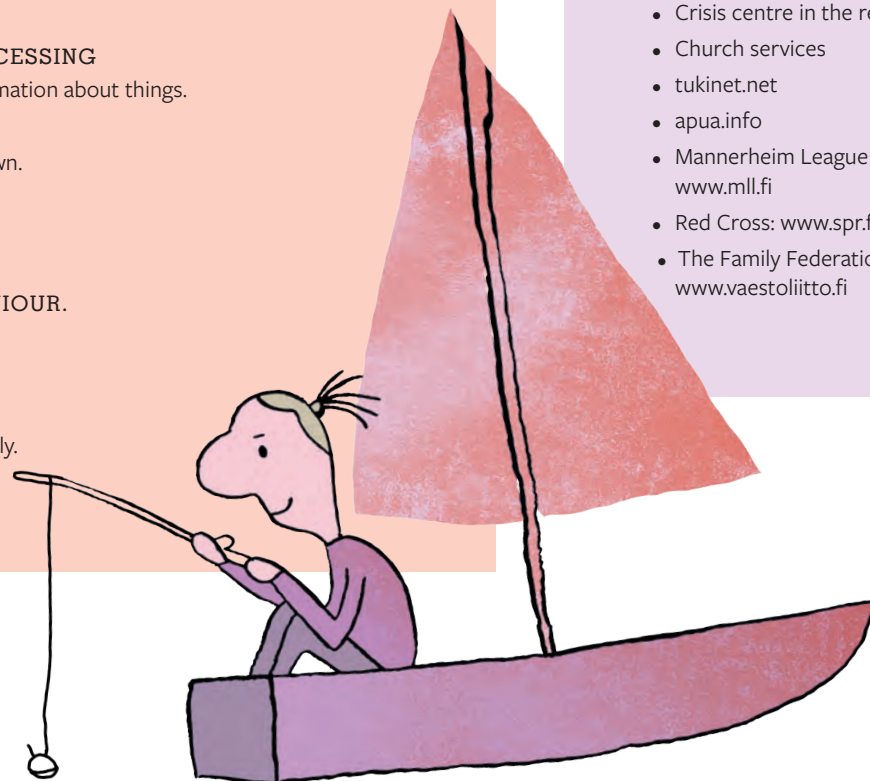
COGNITIVE PROCESSING

- Finding new information about things.
- Making plans.
- Writing things down.
- Solving problems.
- Making lists.

PHYSICAL BEHAVIOUR.

- Exercising.
- Relaxing.
- Eating well.
- Sleeping sufficiently.

(Ayalon 1995)



Supporting grieving children

- Be open, tell the truth.
- Provide time, do not set time limits.
- Create safety through daily routines.
- Encourage children to express their emotions.
- Help children reminisce.

Cooperation with parents

Utilise the Dealing with Worries and Children's Safety Net posters and tools and the exercises connected to them.

Where to find help

You could make a list of services that provide help in your area.

Services in Finland:

- SOS Crisis Centre
- National crisis helpline 01019 5202
- The Finnish Association for Mental Health: www.famh.fi
- Child health clinics and family counselling
- Social work and child protection
- Municipality's mental health services
- Crisis centre in the region
- Church services
- tukinet.net
- apua.info
- Mannerheim League for Child Welfare: www.mll.fi
- Red Cross: www.spr.fi
- The Family Federation of Finland: www.vaestoliitto.fi



Harry hedgehog's journey to animal children's day care

The physical activity and vocal warmup fairytale has been adapted and arranged by Tuuli Paasolainen from Harry Hedgehog written by Ilpo Paasolainen.

Harry Hedgehog is wrapped up into a tiny little spiky ball on his bed. *(Children lie on the floor in a circle wrapped into little balls.)*

Harry is feeling nervous about starting in day care today.

Mummy Hedgehog is comforting Harry, and Harry Hedgehog starts stretching. *(Children stretch their arms and legs and make morning stretching noises.)*

Harry scurries to the breakfast table and starts eating his breakfast. *(Children get up and start munching.)*

Harry Hedgehog and Mummy Hedgehog scuttle towards Animal Children's Day Care Centre. *(Children get up and start scuttling around in a circle. An adult can play scurrying music with claves.)*

Harry Hedgehog stops. *(Everyone stops.)*
"What's wrong Harry? Why did you stop?"
Asks Mummy Hedgehog.

"A be-bear is coming towards us!" Harry Hedgehog exclaims. *(Children take bear steps. An adult plays the drums. Then everyone stops.)*
"Hello Harry! Are you coming to day care too?"
asks Bear. *(Everyone stands up.)*

"I, I am," says Harry Hedgehog still feeling a bit nervous.

"Are you feeling anxious about your first day?"
asks Bear.

"I am nervous," Harry Hedgehog replies. "I am feeling thiiiiis worried about today," Harry

Hedgehog continues. *(Everyone stretches their arms as high up as they can.)*

Bear replies, "I am also feeling at least thiiiiis anxious." *(Everyone stretches their arms to the side and then allow them to hang down with their jaws relaxed and open whilst making a warmup sound. The tongue can also hang out. To make it more effective, everyone can also run in place calmly.)*

Harry Hedgehog suddenly feels like laughing. He does not feel half as worried now that he knows that Bear is also feeling nervous. And Bear is really kind and nice, although Harry Hedgehog was initially scared of her. Mummy Hedgehog smiles next to Harry.

So Harry Hedgehog keeps scurrying along as Bear trudges next to him and Mummy Hedgehog follows the two friends behind them. *(Children move to the beat of one of the two instruments: Claves – scurrying around in a circle, drums – bear walk.)*

Finally, they arrive at the Animal Children's Day Care Centre *(everyone stops)*. The adult in the day care centre, friendly Ellis Elk, smiles and welcomes all the animals into day care.

The animals run in and sit down for morning circle time. *(Everyone runs around in a circle and then sits down.)*

The day goes well and Harry isn't feeling half as nervous the following day, because now he knows what it is like at his day care. Harry Hedgehog makes many new animal friends. Later he finds out that everyone had felt nervous on their first day at day care. And so our story ends.

Translation: Aino Kattelus
(Paasolainen, T. Musiikki-iloa kymmenen kiloa. 2015)



The stunt course of speed and danger.

Adults put together a stunt course for children.

The stunt course may include a mat for roly-polies, hula-hoops for jumping through, wall bars for climbing and rings for hanging. Children have to negotiate pits, go around jagged rocks, jump from stone to stone whilst avoiding crocodiles and sharks. The stunt course can also include a refuelling pit stop, where children can pick up a throw bean bag that gives them extra strength for completing the course. At the end of the stunt course awaits a treasure chest. The treasure chest contains different empowering, positive pictures, and the children get to choose a picture that pleases them. There may be pictures of safe adults, pets, different toys and other children. The pictures are then used to discuss with the children the different things that give joy to them in their daily lives. The children get a little sticker or a certificate as an award for completing the stunt course. The exercise boosts children's self-image and leaves them feeling positive about their abilities.

Cushion game



There are cushions on the floor and the music is playing. Whilst the music plays, the children walk around the space and when it ends, they find a

cushion to sit on. Gradually an adult starts removing cushions, and the children still have to make enough space for everyone on the cushions. When there are not enough cushions for everyone, children can sit on one another's laps or even just put a foot on a cushion. In this game, no one drops out.

Let's look at art: Summer Breeze



This artwork is by artist Eero Järnefelt. The artwork is called *Summer Breeze*. It has been done with pencil and gouache on paper in 1924.

The size of the painting is 36 x 44 cm.

Eero has achieved a delicate and tender feel for this painting through the use of pencil and gouache. You can see the use of pencil in the artwork, and the delicately precise stalks of grass have been painted with a small brush. Can you feel a summer breeze when you look at the artwork? Can you hear the rustle of the grasses in the wind? Do you think the weather on the beach is boiling hot or cool and refreshing?

The artwork's scenery is a wild natural beach. Humans haven't made any changes to the beach or built anything there. The picture has no buildings or people. Far in the

horizon lie islands. There are no boats anywhere. It is almost as if the picture was of a desert island. Sometimes, it can be nice to spend quiet time by yourself. Do you sometimes like just resting or reading on your own?

When you look at the artwork, you get a feeling that this was an important place for Eero. He may have enjoyed the tranquillity and beauty of the spot. The picture of the landscape leaves you feeling calm and leisurely. What do you think Eero was thinking of when he was painting that picture? What kind of a place makes you feel good, and where do you feel comfortable and safe? Is your favourite place somewhere here on planet Earth or is it maybe an imaginary place? What is it like there?

- What is the weather like in the artwork?
- Have you noticed that the weather can affect your mood?
- How would you dress if you went on an expedition to that beach?
- What would you find in the sand?
- Who would you like to go with on an adventure to that beach?
- What can you see in the artwork?
- Would you like to build or add something to the landscape?



Let's make environmental art!

You can make environmental art alone or together with others. Often a work of art made in a group is impressive and a great shared experience. Making environmental art allows you to observe the surrounding world and teaches you to see its beauty. The process of making environmental art may also give you new insights into how we can all impact the prosperity and safety of our environment.

The group discusses what kinds of beautiful and fun things the children have seen and experienced in the great outdoors or in their local surroundings. Where can you see and experience them? Let's go out and about locally to see fun places.

Based on the children's observations and the group's local outing, one theme is chosen as the shared topic. If, for example, colours or shapes have come up in the children's stories and observations, then that can be used as a basis for the shared environmental artwork.

The artwork can be, say, a patchwork on a near-by rock made up of the different colours found in various natural materials. The colours and materials could be organised into a colour wheel in the day care centre's playground.





Herofjärnefält
Hångö, 1924