

The Earthquake Agenda in the Classroom

Dear Teachers,

We are going through a challenging process after the earthquake disaster in our country, which left us all with deep sadness. We, both as adults and educators, are in mixed feelings. Our children are exposed to many written or visual content about the earthquake, which is difficult for even us adults to talk about. Having a conversation about these issues with our students after natural disasters can be quite challenging and we may want to avoid this. Concern about encountering and witnessing the trauma directly, learning about the traumatic event, being constantly exposed to the details of extreme traumatic events can be shown as the reasons for this. Considering the consequences of the earthquake, it is obvious that its impact will continue for a long time. Therefore, we, educators, who will be in direct contact with children from the moment of returning to schools, will have tremendous responsibilities. Being exposed to the pain of the earthquake and its aftermath on television and on different social media platforms every day has a traumatizing effect, and those who witness it can be as affected or have similar reactions as those who have been traumatized.

Even if the majority of our students haven't personally witnessed the incidents at the disaster area, it is likely that they have been exposed to images that will challenge them psychologically through the media. The news showing our citizens who lost their lives, waiting to hear from their loved ones amidst of the rubble and trying to continue their lives in harsh weather conditions upsets us all. Children who don't know what to do with this sadness may show different reactions, or the increase in their anxiety level may escalate their curiosity about the subjects they may not have thought about before and create a need to ask questions. It is inevitable for them to get

confused after meeting and sharing information with their peers who have different levels of knowledge in the school environment. For this reason, it is quite significant for them to get honest and clear answers from a reliable source in this process.

First of all, it will be more reassuring if you convey that the search and rescue teams responded to the disaster as quickly as possible, but that every natural disaster has unfavorable consequences, as well as painful losses, since you mention the reality of the event. Statements such as "You'll be fine, Never mind, Don't worry about it" should definitely be avoided. In particular, saying things like "It could have been worse" implying that they were lucky should be avoided. It should be noted that the negative emotions they experience are extremely natural, and some of the somatic distress they feel (headache, stomachache, nausea, etc.) is also natural and that they are not sick. It is critically important as the school community to inform the students about what to do in case of possible earthquakes, instead of saying "It's over" or "Nothing will happen" to relieve them.

What Can You Do for Students in the Classroom?

After the earthquake disaster we experienced, as teachers, we would like to share with you some points that may help students when we return to the classrooms. The most basic need of children is to feel that they and their loved ones are safe. The first condition for helping them is to be as calm, reassuring and consistent as you can. Allow children to express their feelings such as fear and anger about the earthquake in the classroom, and even encourage them to do so. Do not prevent them from crying, and answer their repetitive questions.

In order to provide psychological support to our students in the classroom environment, you can do the following:

- Answering and explaining their repetitive questions to comfort them,
- Helping them identify their feelings,
- Creating the necessary environment for them to express their thoughts and dreams,
- Supporting them to establish the connection between incidents and their feelings,
- Providing space for children to talk about their positive memories and enabling them to remember.

The above mentioned are among the first things to be done. It is known that children are relieved when they share their feelings and thoughts, and that some children show their fear and anxiety with hyperactivity. It is important not to insist on children who don't want to show understanding and express their feelings in these situations, to observe the needs of children well, and to make them feel that you will listen to them whenever they want.

Possible Explanations for Kindergarten and Primary School Students:

It is utmost important to convey the situation to the child in an appropriate language. The explanation is shaped according to the age group of the child. At primary school level, concretization is very important for children to make sense of events. You can use stacked wooden blocks or books to tell them about the earthquake. By pulling out a book or block at the bottom and showing the shake, you may explain: "Sometimes the rocks below the ground move and crash into each other. Then, the earth shakes. We naturally feel this shake when it happens harshly. An earthquake is a natural phenomenon, like rain, snow, and the formation of seasons. Just as we cannot prevent rain from happening, we cannot prevent earthquakes from happening."

Showing Patience and Understanding

Children need time to recover from the effects of the earthquake. It is critical to observe the normalization process by giving time to our students in our classes. In the classroom,

when students share their concerns about the destructiveness of the earthquake, we should listen to them and make them realize the normality of their emotions. You may say "We all experienced the negative effects of the earthquake together. Now, while life is starting to normalize, it is natural for you to be affected emotionally. Not only you, but everyone who has been exposed to this earthquake has experienced these. Everyone was scared. What we felt was much stronger than fear. Most people felt helpless and unable to do anything like you. It is natural to see all these symptoms in the first weeks in people who follow the destruction caused by the earthquake from afar. If you notice serious changes in the mood of the class after such conversations, if you observe that they're lost in thought and that it makes it difficult for them to stay in the moment, you can practice with physical exercises. Exercises such as standing up, jumping and waving hands, taking deep breaths can help refresh them. For our younger students, using their imagination and dreaming that their anxiety is going somewhere for a while can help them breathe a sigh of relief and relax. After expressing their concerns about the earthquake as a mental exercise, these and similar exercises can be done as a closing: Imagine your anxieties taking a long journey through space. Imagine your anxieties wearing space helmet and space uniforms to board a space shuttle going to a distant planet. When it's time for the countdown, say goodbye to your anxieties and start counting 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and lift-off!

What Else Can We Do As Teachers?

When children ask questions about what happened, do not avoid answering their questions, but approach them with a descriptive language without trying to change the subject. It is very significant for adults to instill confidence in the child at these moments. As children ask you questions, say that the earthquake is a rare natural disaster, but that you are safe right now. In addition, you can share the information that there are people who work to mitigate the effects of what has happened and keep families safe, and that you can seek help from

the relevant authorities if needed. In addition, it is important that all teachers have sufficient knowledge about the subject before explaining the earthquake to the children, act calmly and naturally while sharing, and talk about the issue as if they are giving a lecture.

You can say that the earthquake is a natural event that is beyond our control, but we are prepared for the earthquake. Determine the precautions to be taken by making an earthquake plan before the earthquake. Share information with children such as securing furnitures to the wall at home, creating an earthquake bag and keeping it within reach, who will stand where in the event of an earthquake, and what the life triangle means. You can also remind them of the school drill and the "drop, cover, hold" method. You can make the children feel safe by telling them that they are already prepared for the earthquake and that they have completed the exercise well.

Avoid giving detailed information while talking to children. Make sure that the posts are appropriate for the their age and reality. When they ask a question about something that you don't know, do not panic and tell them that you will learn and tell them later, and apply that.

Finally, make sure to share with the relevant guidance teacher the different developmental conditions you observe in any child in terms of physical, emotional, behavioral or academic sense. In this difficult process for each of us, please contact us knowing that professional support is required if the effects of the earthquake become unbearable for you and your family members. As the Guidance Unit, we would like you to know that we are always here for you by doing our best.

When children ask what we should do if an earthquake occurs while they are at school, you can answer their questions by saying the following:

"Turkey is a country located in the earthquake zone. Accepting this fact and knowing what to do in the event of an earthquake will prevent possible damages to a great extent. All buildings belonging to our school have been built in

accordance with earthquake regulations and have been built in such a way that they will not be damaged in the face of a possible earthquake. The windows in the classrooms are made of unbreakable material, and the ceilings are made of materials suitable for earthquakes. The tools in the classrooms are positioned in such a way that they will not fall over during any tremor."

We can often remind our students during this period that doing drills at our school seriously will make a great contribution to reducing the possible damage. We hope that we can get through these difficult days in unity and solidarity. We wish Allah's mercy on all our citizens who lost their lives in the disaster, extend our condolences to their bereaved families, and hope a speedy recovery for the injured.

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