

## RESPONDING TO A CHILD'S OR PARENT'S TRAUMATIC MEMORY

It can be difficult to know how to respond when a child or parent brings up a traumatic experience, or how to support refugee children who have behaviours and emotions that challenge our usual ways of responding.

In these moments, it's important to:

- Avoid responding with strong emotions.
- Pause and think about how you can respond genuinely and compassionately.
- Acknowledge, affirm and accept the parent or child's emotions.
- Remind the parent or child that they are safe now and, if appropriate, that they are not to blame for what happened.
- Try to reframe negative thinking patterns and/or errors in the child's perception. You might need to clarify facts with parents. Remind them that the child needs to express themselves and be heard. The parent may think it would be better for the child to just forget about it. It is OK to listen and not try to fix things. Just be there.
- Redirect the child to an activity that allows them to either express their emotions (i.e., creative, sensory or physical) or move past the trigger, thought, action or emotion.

For example, if a child puts a dolly on the floor, lowers their head and says: "dead baby," you might respond by saying, "It looks like you feel sad when you think about that. But it is safe here, and this is just a dolly that we can pretend to feed and cuddle and take care of." Alternatively, if the child has limited English, you could use body language and simple terms like "sad," "safe now," and "dolly" to communicate the same message. Watch for cues to determine whether the child might like to talk about it, or whether they are ready to move on to pretend play like taking care of the dolly or to choosing another activity.

