

School Safety Discussion Points/Tips for Parents and Educators

*Information was taken from various articles and resources from The National Association of School Psychologists' website:
<http://www.nasponline.org/>

First and foremost, schools are very safe places. Although you cannot guarantee that nothing bad will ever happen, the probability of a school experiencing a high-profile violent act is extremely low.

What to Say to Children following a Traumatic Event:

Let their questions guide what and how much information to provide and emphasize the positive things that children/families/schools can do to stay safe.

Keep explanations developmentally appropriate. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

- **Early elementary school** students need brief, simple information that is balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them. Give simple examples of school safety that remind children about exterior doors being locked, child monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills being practiced so they are prepared if something happens.
- **Young children** often gauge how threatening an event is by adult reactions (i.e., if caregivers act scared and frightened, young children will view the event as scary and frightening).
- "Schools are safe places. Our school staff works with local police and fire departments, emergency responders, and hospitals to keep you safe."
- "Our school is safe because...."
- **Emphasize the positive things that child/family/schools can do to stay safe**
- "We all play a role in the school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous, or frightened."
- Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the **possibility** of something happening and **probability** that it will affect you or our school.

Other Suggestions:

- Set limits around television and social media viewing because too much exposure can increase fears.
- Provide a consistent structure and routine for children, as this helps to generate a sense of psychological safety.
- Provide a safe place for your children to talk about their fears.
- Encourage healthy and safe coping strategies (**see below for examples**).
- Maintain contact with your children's teachers, as they can connect children with supports inside the school where they can talk through their feelings and reactions.
- Seek help immediately from your school's psychologist, counselor, social worker, and/or nurse if your child is experiencing strong emotional reactions and/or you have noticed significant changes to his/her behavior (e.g., anxiety, sleep problems, acting out, new problems at school or with academic work, school refusal)
- Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.

Adult reactions can influence children's reactions. Children may look to adults to determine how to respond and cope with stress. You can model appropriate coping strategies in the following ways.

- Communicate with loved ones about feelings and healthy coping strategies.
- Take care of your own physical health.
- Make time to do things you enjoy with family and friends in your community.
- Access school and community resources. Many schools have parent and/or cultural liaisons who can help connect families to supports in their communities.
- Help others in your community by referring them to helpful resources.
- One of the best ways for students to recover from the effects of a tragedy is to maintain or return to their normal school routines and participate in things that they enjoy. Normal routines help establish a sense of calm and predictability important to maintaining effective learning environments.

Coping Strategies/Outlets for Feelings:

Some children prefer writing, playing/listening to music or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings. Other strategies are not limited to, but may include:

- Taking a walk
- Baking/cooking with family
- Eating a healthy snack
- Giving someone a hug
- Building something (with Legos, clay, blocks, Play-Doh etc.)
- Watching a good movie
- Reading a joke book
- Having a family game night

Teachers can provide parents with contact information for additional support or questions:

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