

## ***Tips From Your School Psychologist***

### **Talking to Children About Violence**

High profile acts of violence, particularly in schools, can confuse and frighten children who may feel in danger or loved-ones are at risk. They will look to adults for information and reassurance. Parents and school psychologists can help children feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security and talking with them about their fears.

1. **Reassure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that schools are very safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them appropriately.

2. **Make time to talk.** Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Let children know how much information to provide. Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate. Some children may prefer talking while doing an art project, or even imaginative play as an outlet.

3. **Review safety procedures.** This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify the adult at school and in the community to whom they will go if they feel threatened or at risk.

4. **Observe children's emotional state.** Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can indicate a state of discomfort. If symptoms persist or intensify despite reassurance, talk to your school psychologist, school counselor, or private mental health professional.

5. **Limit viewing of television coverage of a particular event.** Be aware if the television is on in common areas where children might be watching or saying when younger children are around.

6. **Maintain a normal routine.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health.

### **Suggested Points to Emphasize When Talking With Children About School-Related Violence**

Schools are safe places. School staff works with parents and public safety providers (local police and fire responders, hospitals, etc.) to keep you safe.

The school building is safe because ... (cite specific school procedures).

We all play a role in school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you nervous or frightened.

There is a difference between reporting and rattling/tattling. You can provide important information to a trusted adult what you know or hear.

Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the **possibility** of something happening and the **probability** that it will affect you (our school community). Senseless violence is hard for everyone to understand. Doing things that you enjoy, sticking to your normal routine, and your friends and family help make us feel better and keep us from worrying about the event.

Sometimes people do bad things that hurt others. They may be unable to handle their anger, under stress, or suffering from mental illness. Adults (parents, teachers, police officers, doctors, faith leaders) work to help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel away from drugs and alcohol.

Stay away from guns and other weapons. Tell an adult if you know that someone has a gun. Access to guns is a major factor for deadly violence.

Violence is never a solution to personal problems. Students can be part of the positive solution by participating in programs at school, learning conflict mediation skills, and seeking help from an adult if they or a peer are experiencing depression, or other emotions they cannot control.

[Adapted from: "Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers," National Association of School Psychologists, 2006. NASP has additional information for parents and educators on school safety, violence prevention, and crisis response at \[www.nasponline.org\]\(http://www.nasponline.org\).](#)

no longer or worry that their friends  
personnel can help children feel

explain that all feelings are okay  
encourage them in expressing these feelings

use their questions as your guide as  
children prefer writing, playing music,

help children identify at least one

child's level of anxiety or  
consult a counselor, pediatrician, or

identify areas and what adults or older

health.

fire departments, emergency

that makes you feel uncomfortable,

that may prevent harm by telling a

understand the difference between  
(safety).

normal routine, and being with

the influence of drugs or alcohol,  
very hard to get those people  
I really upset or angry and to stay

guns is one of the leading risk

participating in anti-violence  
is struggling with anger,

[n of School Psychologists \(NASP\),](#)  
[, children's trauma reactions, and](#)