

The recent shooting has evoked many emotions—sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety, and anger. Schools are supposed to be one of the safe places, where students go to learn and be with friends.

Children who are struggling with their thoughts and feelings about the stories and images of the shooting may turn to trusted adults for help and guidance. Reinforcing safety after this tragedy is important with very young children. They need to hear that their parents/caregivers will do everything they can to keep them safe. Schools will be working to be sure that their school is a safe place for learning and having fun with friends and classmates.

Talking to Children about the shooting:

- It is up to you to decide when or if to talk about the shooting with your child, but, not talking about it can make the event even more threatening in your child's mind. Silence suggests that what has occurred is too horrible even to speak about or that you do not know what has happened. With social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, text messages, newsbreaks on favorite radio and TV stations, and others), it is highly unlikely that children and teenagers have not heard about this. Chances are your child has heard about it, too.
- What does your child already know? Start by asking what your child/teen already has heard about the events from the media and from friends. Listen carefully; try to figure out what he or she knows or believes. As your child explains, listen for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns. Understand that this information will change as more facts about the shooting are known.
- Gently correct inaccurate information. If your child/teen has inaccurate information or misconceptions, take time to provide the correct information in simple, clear, age-appropriate language.
- Encourage your child to ask questions, and answer those questions directly. Your child/teen may have some difficult questions about the incident. For example, she may ask if it is possible that it could happen at their school; she is probably really asking whether it is "likely." The concern about re-occurrence will be an issue for caregivers and children/teens alike. While it is important to discuss the likelihood of this risk, she is also asking if she is safe. This may be a time to review plans your family has for keeping safe in the event of any crisis situation. Do give any information you have on the help and support the victims and their families are receiving. Let her know that the person responsible is under arrest and cannot hurt anyone else. Like adults, children/teens are better able to cope with a difficult situation when they have the facts about it. Having question-and-answer talks gives your child ongoing support as he or she begins to cope with the range of emotions stirred up by this tragedy.
- Limit media exposure. Limit your child's exposure to media images and sounds of the shooting, and do not allow your very young children to see or hear any TV/radio shooting-related messages. Even if they appear to be engrossed in play, children often are aware of what you are watching on TV or listening to on the radio. What may not be upsetting to an adult may be very upsetting and confusing for a child. Limit your own exposure as well. Adults may become more distressed with nonstop exposure to media coverage of this shooting. If your child has watched coverage, take a minute to turn off the television and ask the child about what they think about what was seen. This also gives you an opportunity to discuss the event and gently correct misperceptions.

Ms. Hicks

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

www.NCTSN.org

Below are links for more suggestions on how to respond to students and children regarding the Newtown tragedy.

<http://rems.ed.gov/HelpingYouthandChildrenRecoverFromTraumaticEvents.aspx>

http://www.oumedicine.com/docs/ad-psychiatry-workfiles/school_disaster_media_factsheet_2011.pdf?sfvrsn=2

<http://shine.yahoo.com/parenting/talk-kids-newtown-school-shooting-195600575.html>

http://www.fox.k12.mo.us/pages/Fox_C-6/Parents/Superintendents_Message/121412

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/video/newtown-school-shooting-talking-kids-tragedy-17998137>