

Marysville-Pilchuck High School Shooting

In this issue:

Talking to Your Children About the Recent Spate of School Shootings **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Tips for Talking to Children in Trauma..... 2

Additional Resource 4

School shootings are a terrible reminder of how unfortunate acts of aggression and violence can strike in the most unexpected places, threaten the lives of students and staff members, and unsettle local communities and the nation as a whole.

The resources collected in this newsletter address helping students in your family understand what has happened and what steps they can take to remain alert, aware, and prepared for a dangerous situation away from home. From recommendations for how to address very serious topics with school-age children to providing support for young students affected by violence or upset by the images broadcast across different media, these articles help to create a foundation for care and recovery.

Talking to Your Children About the Recent Spate of School Shootings

Few events hit home for children and families like a school shooting. When children see such an event on television or on Web-based news flashes, it is natural for them to worry about their own school and their own safety, particularly if the violence occurred nearby or in a neighboring city or state.

Talk to your children

Psychologists who work in the area of trauma and recovery advise parents to use the troubling news of school shootings as an opportunity to talk and listen to their children. It is important, say these psychologists, to be honest. Parents should acknowledge to children that bad things do happen, but also reassure them with the information that many people are working to keep them safe, including their parents, teachers, and local police.

Young children may communicate their fears through play or drawings. Elementary school children will use a combination of play and talking to express themselves. Adolescents are more likely to have the skills to communicate their feelings and fears verbally. Adults should be attentive to children's concerns, but also try to help children put their fears into proportion to the real risk. Again, it is important to

reassure children that the adults in their lives are doing everything they can to make their environment—school, home, and neighborhood—safe for them.

Parents, teachers, and school administrators also need to communicate with one another not only about how to keep kids safe, but about which children might need more reassurance and the best way to give it to them.

Limit exposure to news coverage

Parents should also monitor how much exposure a child has to news reports of traumatic events, including these recent school shootings. Research has shown that some young children believe that the events are reoccurring each time they see a television replay of the news footage.

Know the warning signs

Most children are quite resilient and will return to their normal activities and personality relatively quickly, but parents should be alert to any signs of anxiety that might suggest that a child or teenager might need more assistance. Such indicators could be a change in the child's school performance, changes in relationships with peers and teachers, excessive worry, school refusal, sleeplessness, nightmares, headaches or stomachaches, or loss of interest in activities that the child used to enjoy. Also remember that every child will respond to trauma differently. Some will have no ill effects; others may suffer an immediate and acute effect. Still others may not show signs of stress until sometime after the event.

For more information, go to the [APA Help Center](#).

American Psychological Association



Tips for Talking to Children in Trauma

Children are just as affected as adults are by a disaster or traumatic event. Some may be affected even more, but no one realizes it. Without intending to, we, as parents, may send our children a message that it is not all right to talk about the experience. This may cause confusion, self-doubt, and feelings of

helplessness for a child. Children need to hear that it is normal to feel frightened during and after a disaster or traumatic event. When you acknowledge and normalize these feelings for your children, it will help them cope with their experience and move on.

Following exposure to a disaster or traumatic event, children are likely to show signs of stress. Signs include sadness and anxiety, outbursts and tantrums, aggressive behavior, a return to earlier behavior that was outgrown, stomachaches and headaches, and an ongoing desire to stay home from school or away from friends. These reactions are normal and usually do not last long. Whether your child is a preschooler, adolescent, or somewhere in between, you can help your child by following the suggestions below.

Preschooler

- Stick to regular family routines.
- Make an extra effort to provide comfort and reassurance.
- Avoid unnecessary separations.
- Permit a child to sleep in the parents' room temporarily.
- Encourage expression of feelings and emotions through play, drawing, puppet shows, and storytelling.
- Limit media exposure.
- Develop a safety plan for future incidents.

Elementary-Age Children

- Provide extra attention and consideration
- Set gentle but firm limits for acting out behavior.
- Listen to a child's repeated telling of his/her trauma experience.
- Encourage expression of thoughts and feelings through conversation and play.
- Provide home chores and rehabilitation activities that are structured, but not too demanding.
- Rehearse safety measures for future incidents.
- Point out kind deeds and the ways in which people helped each other during the disaster or traumatic event.

Preadolescents and Adolescents

- Provide extra attention and consideration.
- Be there to listen to your children, but don't force them to talk about feelings and emotions.
- Encourage discussion of trauma experiences among peers.
- Promote involvement with community recovery work.
- Urge participation in physical activities.
- Encourage resumption of regular social and recreational activities.
- Rehearse family safety measures for future incidents.

It is important to remember that you do not have to "fix" how your child feels. Instead, focus on helping your child understand and deal with his or her experiences. Healing is an evolving state for most children, but some may need professional help.

If signs of stress do not subside after a few weeks, or if they get worse, consider consulting a mental health professional who has special training in working with children. In time, and with help, your children will a return to health.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ©2014

Additional Resource

As an additional resource to assist you with helping your child(ren) understand, cope with, and recover from the Marysville-Pilchuck High School shooting, here's a parent's guide produced by the National Institutes of Mental Health. Use this information to determine the right steps and strategies for attentive care that will help younger family members in need.

[Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters](#)

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)