

Good Morning,

I am contacting parents and staff to let you know that the district's administrative and counseling staff met this morning to determine the best course of action for us to take in response to the tragic shootings on December 14 in Newtown, CT.

We have all been shocked by the horrific events that took place at the Sandy Hook Elementary School on Friday. Our hearts go out to the many families touched by the tragedy and our deepest sympathies are with them.

We want to assure you that we have precautions, procedures, and systems in place to keep our children and staff safe while they are at school. While no system is flawless, a continuous review of our procedures to insure they comply with the most up-to-date strategies for dealing with emergencies is essential for insuring the safety of our schools.

After every tragic event in our nation's public schools, we review our policies and procedures with state and local police, fire, and emergency officials to ensure we have the most current strategies and tactics in place to maintain a safe and secure school environment. We will also continue our ongoing practice of training staff, running school wide drills, and completing exercises with emergency personnel to insure staff and students know how to handle themselves and are familiar with emergency procedures.

As educators and parents it can be difficult to speak with children about tragedies such as these and the district will provide access to school counselors and members of the district's crisis team for any student, parent, or staff members having problems processing this incident. It is important for all of us to stress that our schools are safe, that shooting incidents and violence in schools occur very rarely, and that individuals should be supported in seeking assistance if they have continuing concerns surrounding this incident. The other aspect to consider if individuals bring up questions related to Asperger's and the autism spectrum is that there is no documented connection between

Asperger's and violence, therefore there is no reason to fear individuals with this diagnosis. The district will not be initiating discussions around this tragedy, nor will we be sharing any media stories related to the incident. We will respond to questions and ensure students know they can discuss this with parents or school counsellors.

The following is a list of tips from the National Association of School Psychologists about what parents can do at times like this:

1. Reassure children that they are safe. Emphasize that schools are very safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
2. Make time to talk. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient. Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily.
3. Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.
  - a. Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them.
  - b. Upper elementary and early middle school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.
  - c. Upper middle school and high school students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines, communicating any personal safety concerns to

school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.

4. Review safety procedures. This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.
5. Observe children's emotional state. Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of a mental health professional if you are at all concerned.
6. Limit television viewing of these events. Limit television viewing and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.
7. Maintain a normal routine. Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

For additional information, visit the district website at:

[http://www.grsd.org/information/emergency and safety information](http://www.grsd.org/information/emergency_and_safety_information)

I also want to take a moment to remind people that it's imperative that everyone follow procedures when arriving on campus. Use only the front entrances when arriving at our schools, check in with the security

booth (5-12) or front office secretary (Littleville and Chester) and make sure that you check out with the same individuals upon departure. All entrances to our schools are locked throughout the day and should not be propped open by staff, parents, or students for any reason. It is also very important to realize that we all have a role to play in maintaining a safe school environment. Please continue to be observant and let us know if there are items that seem to compromise school safety and security by contacting the school or using the safety hotline (685-1050).

Thanks for your continued support in ensuring a safe school environment for all.