

Talking to Children about the Shooting ^[1]



Talking to Children about the Shooting

The recent shooting has evoked many emotions—sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety, and anger. 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.

- Start the conversation. Talk about the shooting with your child. 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 your workplace; 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. 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.

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National Child Traumatic Stress Network
www.NCTSN.org

Resource Description

Provides information on how to talk to children about mass shootings. This tip sheet describes ways to talk to children about mass violence events that involve a shooting. It gives tips about how to start the conversation, common reactions children may have, and how to seek help if needed.

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Type: Tip Sheet

Trauma Type:

Terrorism and Violence

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Links

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