



Talking to Your Children About School Shootings

- 1. Listen and validate their feelings.** Really listen to your children. Let them know that they are entitled to feel how they're feeling. They might be scared, angry, or anxious, or they might not be affected much at all since it happened far from where they live.
- 2. Explain that events like these are very rare.** Although parents can't tell kids that a school shooting will never happen in Great Falls, they can stress the point that such occurrences are very rare, which is why they're big news when they do happen.
- 3. Feel free to answer "I don't know" to tough questions.** Kids may ask why the shooter killed elementary school kids and teachers. Or they may wonder how God could allow this to happen. Sometimes you have to say, "I don't have an answer to that, or what do you think?" Just make sure you answer honestly.
- 4. Give kids a little leeway to deal with their anxieties.** If a child wants a parent to walk him or her into school for a few days, try to accommodate that request. But also explain that we can't stop living our lives.
- 5. Know your school's safety plan.** Help children understand that their school has worked hard to keep them safe. These kinds of emergencies are why schools practice lockdown and evacuation drills and that's why it's important to take those drills seriously. This can help kids gain a sense of control. Kids will feel more secure if they know their school has a plan in mind for dealing with the unthinkable. If you don't know your school's safety plan, find out what it is so that you can talk with your children about it.
- 6. Keep the conversation at your child's age level.** If your child is young and hasn't heard about the incident, don't feel like you have to discuss it unless your child brings it up. At ages 5-6, children should be shielded as much as possible from the event. On the other hand, parents may want to start a conversation with older kids who are likely to read the news on the Internet or hear about it from friends. If your child or teen doesn't want to talk about it, that's okay. Don't make your fears and worries theirs.
- 7. Monitor your child's access to the media.** Don't watch the continuing news reporting of this event in the presence of your child. Keep dinner time for conversation. Continual television or internet viewing of events like this can scare children unnecessarily.
- 8. Remind your child that you and everyone at their school are here to protect them.** Stress again with your children that these incidents are isolated, brutal and selfish and that all the adults in their lives are here to protect them.

Excerpt from: Dr. Nancy Snyderman

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