

Tips for Talking with Children Regarding a Tragedy:

Talk to your children

Parents can use the troubling news of school shootings as an opportunity to talk and listen to their children. It is important to be honest and to tell them you don't know why this happened. You should not tell them things like, "this won't happen again," because unfortunately that may not be true. 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.

All emotions are normal and may include anger, fear, sympathy, confusion and uncertainty. Some older students may feel guilty if they aren't grieving when their friends are. 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 a child's concerns, but also try to help the 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.

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.

As always, if you have questions about the safety measures in place at your child's school, or a specific concern about your child, please contact the school office.

Source: American Psychological Association