

*A Family Guide for Talking to
their Children*

Preparing for the passage of another year since the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School tragedy



Day of Service and Love

2/14

#2getherInServiceandLove

As we approach the passage of another year, what reactions should we expect to see in our children?

- Survivors of the tragedy may appear to be “back to normal” but still at times be feeling sad, scared, anxious or angry.
- Children and adults may be distressed about other troubling events in their lives when they are reminded about the tragedy – even if their own experiences are unrelated, such as losses from other causes including the COVID-19 pandemic, violence within their own community, or racial inequities they continue to experience. These other losses and stressors may understandably have primary importance for them.
- Children may not tell their parents/guardians or other adults that they have times when they are feeling upset or worried because they are embarrassed about these feelings or do not want to upset their parents.
- Share your concerns and feelings and how you cope with them.
- Allow children to own their feelings - if they feel scared, they are scared, even if their fears are unrealistic. Provide appropriate reassurance, but also help them learn to deal with grief, fear, sadness and other difficult emotions.
- Invite children to talk with you about what is bothering them. It is, though, generally not appropriate to force them to talk (unless you are concerned that they may hurt themselves or others or are otherwise placing themselves in danger). Remain available and present but wait for them to accept the invitation.
- Some signs of distress to look for include:
 - Sadness or depressed or irritable mood
 - Anxiety or fears
 - Problems with attention or new or worsening academic difficulties
 - Changes in behavior
 - Social isolation or withdrawal from friends or activities that were previously enjoyed
 - Changes in appetite or sleep
 - Physical complaints such as feeling tired, headaches, or stomach aches
 - Acting less mature; having trouble getting along with friends or family members
 - Onset or increase in use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
 - Risky behaviors

- Some children who were not directly impacted by the shooting may resent the attention being focused again on this tragedy; some children who are still having difficulty adjusting to the tragedy may also be opposed to talking about it again.
- As families cope with the global pandemic or other global crisis, and the associated social and political upheaval, it is more important than ever that parents raise their children's awareness on the world around them and encourage them to act with integrity, and in love and service.

Should my children take part in an event or program that commemorates the lives of those who were lost or significantly altered by the shooting or recognizes the impact it has had on our community?

- Memorial and commemorative events can help children express and cope with their feelings that might otherwise seem overwhelming to deal with alone.
- Knowing that others are still, at times, experiencing the impact of the shooting can help children cope more successfully.
- Adults should try not to tell children what they should feel or how they should express their feelings. Instead, ask your children how they are feeling and what they think might help them feel better.
- Figure out ways your children can help others. People are better able to cope with a crisis if they are able to help others, even if the assistance they offer is not related to the tragedy.
- Some children may wish to acknowledge the passage of an additional year in a personally meaningful way and may prefer not to take part in a group activity centered on the commemoration.
- Different children and adults will have different wishes and needs around this time.
- Some children may not prefer any formal or even informal activity. Some children may even be annoyed by the continued or renewed attention focused on a sad event that occurred years ago, especially if they have to deal with more recent losses or crises. Adults should not force or push children to take part in memorial activities.
- By actively planning and taking part in a memorial event as part of the school community, children have some control over how they will remember the tragedy and the impact it has had on themselves and their community.
- Children should have an active role in the planning of memorial events to make sure the events are appropriate to their developmental level and meet their personal needs.
- Memorial events and commemorative activities can be simple and informal.

What can I do at home to help my children prepare for and better understand the memorial events in the school or community?

- Talk to your children about what happened and how they are feeling. Share with them your reactions and feelings and what you have found to help you cope and adjust.
- You can help your children prepare for commemorative activities that will take place in school and the community by having discussions with them at home ahead of time.
- Share any concerns you have with someone in your children's school and let that person know about any relevant personal/family experiences (such as losses or trauma). In that way, the school can provide more effective support for your children.
- Let the school know if you don't feel your children should participate in a memorial or commemorative event that is being held in the school.
- Provide appropriate reassurance, but don't give false reassurance. If they have realistic concerns, help children learn to deal with the uncertainty and fear, rather than try to pretend that the concerns are unrealistic.

- Remind children of ways that you, school staff and others in the community are doing everything possible to keep them safe.
- Consider limiting the amount of exposure to coverage on television or other media (including internet and social media), especially if it involves any graphic or emotional material. If older children

do view television coverage, try to video-record it and watch along with them, and use it as an opportunity to discuss what they are seeing and how it makes them (and you) feel. Children are often quite aware of what adults are watching on television; this is a particularly good time to turn the television off – it will help you to better focus on your children and their needs.

How do I know if my children should get more help than I can provide? Where do I go for such help?

- The passage of another year since the MSD shooting in 2018 may lead to a range of upsetting reactions, even among individuals who are psychologically healthy.
- Speak with someone outside the family for advice if your children remain very upset for several days, are worried about many things, or are having (more) trouble in school, home, or with their friends.
- Talk with someone at school if you have concerns about your children or would like some assistance.
- You may wish to speak with your children’s teacher, social worker, or school counselor; pediatrician; or mental health professional for advice.
- Don’t wait until you think your children need counseling - take advantage of counseling and support whenever you think it will be helpful.

LOCAL RESOURCES

For additional local resources, please access the Broward County Public Schools Mental Health Resources site at browardschools.com/recovery

BCPS STUDENT SUPPORT INITIATIVES & RECOVERY:

Broward County Public Schools remains committed to supporting the ongoing healing and recovery of students, faculty, and the entire community.

Family Counseling Office: 754-321-1590

MSD Wellness Center: 754-322-2266

SUPPORT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:

Dial 2-1-1 BROWARD for ALL Services

If there is an emergency, call or text 911

Broward Connection Guide: browardconnections.org

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255 or 988 | suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Substance Abuse & Mental Health National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP

Eagles' Haven: 954-618-0350 | eagleshaven.org