



TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE

We know children are affected by gun violence in our country even if they have not experienced a shooting on school grounds. For parents and caretakers of school-aged children, there may be uncertainty about how to have a conversation with a child about an incident of gun violence in a way that does not cause further trauma to the child. Here are some helpful tips to approach the conversation with a child.

WHEN FACILITATING THE CONVERSATION

Create a space for them to discuss and explore feelings

- Assure them that any fears are valid, while echoing that you are there to protect them
- Encourage continuous, open-dialogue for them to voice new thoughts and feelings as they arise
- Allow those who are old enough to collaborate in identifying new physical and emotional needs
- Do not make assumptions about what they know or overshare details of the shooting, let them lead the conversation

Foster healthy coping skills and mechanisms

- Promote various emotional outlets for the child that can include art, music, sports, writing, games and activities
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings routinely, initiate check-ins if you sense they may be having a hard time
- Limit and/or monitor media and social media intake to reduce the risk of content that may bring on strong emotions for the child

WHEN TALKING ABOUT AN INCIDENT

Safety

- Keep them grounded in the moment. Point out locks on doors, alarms, security features.
 - Look into specific safety procedures and precautions. Discuss the specific policies, people, and efforts in place working to protect them.
 - Allow them to think through and process their fear of danger.
 - They will likely have many questions or thoughts as to why this happens.
- Don't be dismissive of specific inquiries, and allow them to further explore their needs.

Gun Violence

- First, ask what they may already know.
- Be straightforward and direct, but gentle—leaving out graphic detail.
- Affirm this is an uncomfortable topic, it is okay to be scared. Validate fears while reassuring their safety, and reminding them of prevention efforts.
- Acknowledge the complexity of these emotions, and encourage them to share any thoughts or questions they may later form.
- If you know your child to be in the vicinity of firearms, secure all guns in your home and vehicle. More information about the Be Smart program can be found at [BeSMARTforKids.org](https://www.besmartforkids.org).

Trauma

- Observe children's behavioral and emotional changes. Practice tolerance for those changes when applicable.
- Look for signs that a child is struggling more than they let on, for example, they may experience trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating on school work or chores, changes in appetite or mood. If you are concerned, seek out professional help.
- Understand what may bring on strong emotions for the child. Take measures to reduce the risk of exposure.

Grief and Loss

- Take a similar approach to the steps outlined above. Use simple terms, allow them to openly react and feel, and let them lead the conversation.
- Try to warn them of any alterations to their daily routine or schedule.
- Persisting changes in behavior or concerning reactions may warrant professional attention.

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